

TEACHERS' BELIEFS ABOUT CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

By

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Dedicated to Catherine and Robert Foxworthy

## ABSTRACT

This study begins with questions about teachers' beliefs regarding classroom management and the importance of investigating this aspect of teaching. Qualitative research methods are utilized, including semi-structured and taped interviews, informal and formal observations, and field notes. Four teachers at the Primary/Junior level represent the participants. Data collection took place at two elementary schools within one school board in Northwestern Ontario. Data analysis and interpretation were ongoing throughout the research process.

The findings reveal that the participants believe in respect, and the notion that students' needs must come first. They have developed their beliefs about classroom management through life experiences, professional reading, and professional development. Above all, classroom experience has shaped their beliefs and developed the strategies they currently use, which are as varied as the situations require them to be. Aspects of their beliefs and strategies about classroom management have changed since they began teaching. Participants identified change as being a necessary part of becoming an effective classroom manager, whether it occurs as a result of learning experiences, or gaining knowledge through professional development.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### The Problem

#### *Introduction*

My study explores teachers' beliefs about the classroom management strategies that they employ in their classrooms. My interest in this issue originated from my supply teaching experiences, and instructing a classroom management course at a Northwestern Ontario University's Faculty of Education. As a teacher, I have had the opportunity to observe other teachers' classroom management strategies and often wondered how they came to choose those that they used. Besides this, as an instructor of a classroom management seminar, I have been involved in introducing and facilitating discussions about effective strategies with student teachers.

My experiences led to my interest in discovering what teachers have to say about their own beliefs. This includes how they perceive them to have developed, and see their beliefs influencing the strategies they use to manage their classrooms.

I believe the area of classroom management to be a fundamental component in being an effective teacher. Based upon my experiences in the classroom, classroom management encompasses everything from establishing a positive and respectful rapport with students to preventing misbehaviour and encouraging good behaviour.

#### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this study is to explore teachers' beliefs about classroom management.

#### *Questions Guiding the Research*

1. What are teachers' beliefs about classroom management?

2. How did they develop their beliefs about classroom management?
3. How do their beliefs influence their choice of management strategies?
4. How have their beliefs changed since they were pre-service teachers?

### *The Significance of the Study*

Classroom management can be a major concern for teachers. Recently Canadian researchers have reported that classroom teachers spend more time managing behavioural and social problems than actually teaching (Levin, Nolan, Kerr, & Elliot, 2005). According to Nespor (1987), teachers' ways of thinking and understanding are vital components of their practice. The interaction of beliefs and practices has strong implications for teaching and learning and is an area that needs further investigation (Nespor, 1987; Fang, 1996; Richardson, 1996). Linking together teachers' beliefs and classroom management is the focus of this study. The aim of this study is to provide information regarding teachers' beliefs concerning classroom management, thus adding to the literature on related research.

Studying teachers' beliefs about classroom management has the potential to enhance the type of techniques and strategies that teachers use. The reporting of successful belief systems regarding classroom management may encourage teachers to reflect upon their own beliefs. Teachers may also change or adapt their beliefs according to what could be the most beneficial for both themselves and their students. Pajares (1992) states that few would argue that the beliefs teachers hold influence their perceptions and judgments of which, in turn, affect their behaviour in the classroom.

With respect to Faculties of Education, a greater awareness of the effect that beliefs have on teaching practices may allow for changes made to ineffective belief

systems *before* student teachers begin their practicums in the field; they can explore them in detail throughout the program. Pajares (1992) states the following:

Research findings also suggest that educational beliefs of pre-service teachers play a pivotal role in their acquisition and interpretation of knowledge and subsequent teaching behaviour and that unexplored entering beliefs may be responsible for the perpetuation of antiquated and ineffectual teaching practices (p. 328).

This study may influence classroom management programs to provide a stronger, specific emphasis on the identification, reflection, and enhancement of belief systems to further the development of effective strategies in managing the classroom. Richardson (1996) states that teacher attitudes and beliefs are:

. . . Important considerations in understanding classroom practices and conducting teacher education designed to help prospective and in-service teachers develop their thinking and practice . . . Beliefs and attitudes of [student teachers] strongly affect what and how they learn and are also targets of change within the process (p. 102).

I think that the connection between beliefs and practices is a necessary one. This quotation illustrates the importance of teachers in training to identify and reflect on their belief systems, as they are strong indications of how they will teach their students in the future.

## *Definition of Terms*

### *Teacher Beliefs*

For this study, I define teacher beliefs as personal constructs that can provide an understanding of a teacher's practice (Nespor, 1987). This definition serves best for this study as it brings the concept of beliefs directly into the realm of teaching and practice where the focus of this investigation resided.

### *Classroom Management*

Duke (1987) defines classroom management as the "provisions and procedures necessary to establish and maintain an environment in which instruction and learning can occur," where these practices are both proactive and reactive in nature. I chose this definition because it places an emphasis on the actions that teachers take to make it possible for students to learn effectively within the classroom environment.

### *Limitations*

- This case study is not exhaustive and generalizations cannot be made.

### *Delimitations*

- The participants were limited to elementary school Primary/Junior teachers in Northwestern Ontario. I am a teacher of the Primary/Junior division and am interested in finding new information to further my understanding of this field.

### *Assumptions*

Practicing teachers offered important insights into their beliefs about classroom management.



### *Summary*

I have organized this thesis into six chapters. Subsequent chapters are organized in the following way: Chapter two reviews the literature regarding teacher beliefs and classroom management. Chapter three outlines the research methodology, data collection strategies and data analysis techniques used for this study. Chapter four describes and interprets the data collection during the field research. Chapter five discusses the findings in relation to the research questions and the literature highlighted in chapter two. Chapter six reviews the implications of this study for theory, practice, further research, and presents several conclusions.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Review of Literature

#### *Introduction*

The following literature review provides a background for understanding where teachers' beliefs come from and how beliefs are exemplified in practice by influence.

The literature review focuses on presenting information which relates to identifying and understanding the various themes of teachers' beliefs and classroom management presented in the research questions.

Specifically, this chapter is organized into four main sections. The first, classroom management, discusses definitions, functions, trends, theories, and principles for effective classroom management. The second, teacher beliefs, includes definitions, origins, uses and functions in teaching, research, difficulties in studying, and the importance and significance of studying teachers' beliefs. Section three outlines relationships between beliefs and actions, and section four links teachers' beliefs and classroom management through research.

#### *Classroom Management*

##### *Defining Classroom Management*

Traditionally, classroom management has been viewed as reactive in nature with a focus on reacting *after* students misbehave using discipline to control (Doyle, 1986). A variety of definitions are available from educators and theorists in the field to apply to one's practice. For example, Crehan (1994) suggests that three main dimensions need managing in any school classroom – managing instruction (the presentation of content), managing room arrangement (the classrooms' physical aspects and character), and

managing student behaviour (how the students work and behave). Good and Brophy (1994) explain how classroom management is intertwined with effective instruction when they state that:

Research findings converge on the conclusion that teachers who approach classroom management as a process of establishing and maintaining effective learning environments tend to be more successful than teachers who place more emphasis on their roles as authority figures or disciplinarians (p. 110).

Good and Brophy illustrate the importance of teachers being focused, more on the benefits of a positive learning environment, as opposed to focusing on setting up rules and enforcing them. Teachers' beliefs about classroom management affect their responses to misbehaviour and the behaviour management techniques they use.

Levin et al. (2005) state that "teachers change behaviour only by *influencing* the change through modifications in their own behaviour which is the only behaviour over which teachers have total control" (p. 3). Teachers must be aware of how their actions affect students. They need to strive to establish a belief system about classroom management that will benefit students, bearing in mind that changing the behaviour of students will only come about if they change their own behaviour. For example, Levin et al. report that teachers are constantly involved in a process in which student behaviour is monitored and compared with the teacher's idea of appropriate behaviour; thus, the behaviour the teacher decides to use should be one that maximizes the likelihood that the student's behaviour will change to one that is more appropriate.

Each definition or explanation of classroom management differs to some extent. However, definitions tend to incorporate some aspect of room arrangement and influencing change through behaviour with respect to both the students and teacher. The relation among the physical and psychological environments may provide the basis for belief systems affecting actions, given that a teacher's definition of classroom management is grounded in beliefs expressed in strategies. For example, if a teacher believes in an instructional strategy that includes a lot of group work, he or she may likely have a corresponding seating arrangement of desks in groups. The teacher may structure their lessons differently than if the desks were in straight rows. Consequently, students may learn differently according to how they respond to the group work instructional style. Seating arrangements are an example of teachers' beliefs affecting the physical environment in the classroom.

#### *Functions of Classroom Management*

Classroom management encompasses more than controlling students' behaviours. It also involves management of the classroom environment and instruction, and the presentation of what is taught and the way in which it is taught (Crehan, 1994). Jones (1996) outlines teacher skills and general functions needed for an effectively managed classroom. He states that a comprehensive classroom manager must base their practice on an understanding of current research and theory in classroom management and students' psychological and learning needs.

Instructional methods must facilitate optimal learning by responding to the academic needs of individual students and the classroom group. This means that teachers have a responsibility to be aware of various methods of instruction that will address many

different learning styles. Jones (1996) states that effective management is based on the creation of positive teacher-student relationships. Teachers must be able to use a range of counseling and behavioural methods to help students with persistent and/or serious behaviour problems (p. 507).

### *Trends in Classroom Management*

Since the 1960s, approaches to dealing with student behaviour problems included three major trends. During the 1960s and 1970s, the emphasis was on what to do when students misbehaved. The humanistic psychology school of thought emphasized self-esteem and counseling methods to help students who behaved inappropriately (Jones, 1996).

During the late 1970s and early 1980s an emphasis on responding to behaviour problems shifted to preventing or reducing unproductive behaviour. Since the mid-1980s, classroom management trends became increasingly integrated, with modern contributions incorporating the concepts of past trends. Jones (1996) states an example of concept integration with how “the classical behaviourism of the early 1970s, with its emphasis on reinforcers and consequences, has given way to cognitive behaviourism with its focus on self-management and social skills training” (p. 506). In recent years, a new focus on students’ needs, self-management, social skills training and problem solving became key aspects of effective student management (Levin et al., 2005).

### *Theories of Classroom Management*

Levin et al. (2005) describe three main theories of classroom management as student-directed, collaborative, and teacher-directed. The student-directed theory believes that students have the primary responsibility for controlling their behaviour.

Collaborative management is based on the belief that the control of student behaviour is the joint responsibility of student and teacher. In the teacher-directed method, the teacher assumes primary responsibility for managing student behaviour. Students become effective decision-makers by internalizing rules and guidelines for behaviour.

Levin et al. (2005) describe the models as three points on a continuum that move from student-directed toward teacher-directed practices. The points may be thought of as the beliefs that teachers hold to subscribe to a particular method, or a combination of methods. I have outlined the theories in the following table (p. 99):

Table 2.1. Theories of Classroom Management

Question	Student-Directed	Collaborative	Teacher-Directed
<i>Primary responsibility for management</i>	Student	Joint	Teacher
<i>Goal of management</i>	Caring community focus and self-direction	Respectful relationships, academic focus	Well-organized, efficient, academic focus
<i>Time spent on management</i>	Valuable and productive	Valuable for individual but not for group	Wasted time
<i>Relationships within management system</i>	Caring, personal relationships	Respect for each other	Non-interference with each other's rights
<i>Provision of student choice</i>	Wide latitude and freedom	Choices within teacher-defined options	Very limited
<i>Primary goal in handling misbehaviour</i>	Unmet need to be explored	Minimize in group; pursue individually	Minimize disruption; redirect
<i>Interventions used</i>	Individual conference, group problem solving, restitution, natural consequences	Coping skills, natural and logical consequences, anecdotal record keeping	Clear communication, rewards and punishments, behaviour contracting
<i>Individual differences</i>	Extremely important	Somewhat important	Minor importance
<i>Teacher power bases</i>	Referent, expert	Expert, legitimate	Reward/coercive
<i>Theorists</i>	Charney, Faber and Mazzlish, Gordon, Kohn, Strachota, Putnam and Burke	Curwin and Mendler, Dreikurs, Glasser	Axelrod, Cangelosi, Canter and Canter, Valentine

A natural blending of the above three theories can be found among management behaviours (Levin et al., 2005). If one were to examine a teacher's classroom management style over time, it is often possible to classify their general approach to working with students and goals for classroom management into one of the three theories.

The information in this table is significant because it provides a general guideline for determining which theory teachers may believe in. By examining the specifics of a teacher's classroom management strategies, this table may be used as a reference to locating where on the continuum, between student-directed and teacher-directed, their choice of theory fits. If beliefs influence classroom management strategies, this table may provide for a reference to indicate management techniques that correspond to particular beliefs.

#### *Principles for Effective Classroom Management*

Too often classroom management is conceptualized as a matter of control rather than as a dimension of curriculum, instruction, and the overall climate of the school (Levin et al., 2005). A need exists to look beyond the typical notion of classroom management being solely about controlling students' behaviour because much more is involved in teaching than making students behave so they can learn. When teachers see students' actions as threatening their need for control and as intentional misbehaviour, they are often not confident about their abilities to produce positive results in using effective strategies to relieve the situation (Larrivee, 2005).

Levin et al. (2005) outline principles of classroom management developed by researchers and theorists from experience, research, and study. Principles that reflect effective management strategies and meet the needs of students support a classroom environment that supports learning. Techniques a teacher uses to manage student behaviour should be consistent with a teacher's beliefs about how students learn and develop. For example, if her/his beliefs are grounded in a student-directed theory, they should hold class meetings for opportunities to problem-solve conflicts. Class meetings



are typically used in the student-directed approach, where students are given a lot of responsibility in determining classroom rules and discussing how they want their classroom to be. Students' words then become the guidelines for classroom behaviour. Teachers must consider their beliefs when contemplating the classroom management techniques they will use with their students. Teachers' beliefs may be reflected in their practices and students respond to techniques differently depending on how they learn best. Being aware of the various learning abilities among students is important in choosing management techniques that will be effective in a diverse classroom.

Kohn (1999) found that an emphasis on traditional teaching has produced several undesirable outcomes. Kohn defines traditional teaching as the style where “the teacher selects the curriculum, does the planning, delivers the lessons through lecture, demonstration, worksheets, . . . and tests students to assess their progress” (as cited in Charles, 2005, p. 242). Undesirable outcomes include undermining student interest in learning, making failure seem overwhelming, not leading students to challenge themselves, and reducing the quality of learning (as cited in Charles, 2005). Instead, Kohn argues that teachers need to take their students seriously and honour them as individuals while searching for what they need and enjoy. Leading students to explore topics, providing challenges, and emphasizing that making mistakes are an important part of learning will end the counter-productivity of the traditional emphasis on *how well* students are doing as opposed to *what* they are learning.

Research shows that teachers who are obsessed with disciplining students or who neglect instructional preparation in favour of total control often end up with more control problems than those teachers who are well prepared and focused on their efforts to help

students achieve academically (Brophy & Evertson, 1976). Effective classroom managers strive to elicit students' co-operation. They must involve them in activities that are interesting to prevent potential discipline problems (Cruikshank, Bainer, & Metcalf, 1995).

Relationship-centred teaching, as discussed in Lovegrove and Lewis' (1982) study, has been shown to benefit students and teachers in interpersonal relationships. Many theories have their main objective based around positive relationships between students and teachers. For example, Dreikurs (1995) stated that self-discipline could best be achieved within the context of a democratic classroom where students and teachers work together to decide how the class will function (Dreikurs, 1995, as cited in Charles, 2005). He believed that students turned to the mistaken goals of attention, power, revenge, and inadequacy because of not having a sense of belonging in their class; the goal of the teacher is to identify the mistaken goals and deal with them by discussing the faulty logic involved (Dreikurs & Cassel, 1995).

Dreikurs (1995) asserted teachers and students should formulate those rules for governing class behaviour mutually, in which they put logical consequences for compliance or violation into practice instead of punishment (Dreikurs, 1995, as cited in Charles, 2005). An autocratic classroom, where a teacher makes all of the decisions and imposes them on students, leaves little opportunity for student initiative and responsibility in their decisions; students need to feel like they are valued members of the class where they belong. Effective discipline will occur best in democratic classrooms wherein teacher and students work together to make decisions about how the class will function (Dreikurs & Cassel, 1995).

## *Teacher Beliefs*

### *Defining Teacher Beliefs*

According to Richardson (1996), beliefs may be thought of as “psychologically held understandings, premises, or propositions about the world that are felt to be true” (p. 103). Richardson explains that beliefs and attitudes are subsets of a group of constructs that name, define, and describe the structure and content that drive a person’s actions. In the realm of education, teachers’ beliefs will ultimately affect what they teach and how they teach.

### *Origins of Teachers’ Beliefs*

Teachers’ beliefs may come from a variety of sources. Three categories of experience influence the development of beliefs about teaching – personal experience, experience with schooling and instruction, and experience with formal knowledge (Richardson, 1996). Studies have shown that the influence of the quality of pre-service classroom experience and the opportunity for reflection on the pre-service experience has an effect on a teacher’s beliefs (Brousseau, Book, & Byers, 1998; Bean & Zulich, 1992; Cherland, 1989; Richardson, Gripe, & Thompson, 1987, as cited in Fang, 1996).

Personal experience includes the aspects of life that go into the formation of the world view – the intellectual and moral dispositions, beliefs about self in relation to others, understanding the relationship of schooling to society, and other forms of personal, familial, and cultural understandings. Clandinin (1986) suggests that personal experience is encoded in images that affect practice; these images have moral, emotional, personal, private, and personal dimensions.

Regarding schooling and instruction experience, research has shown students arrive in their pre-service education year with inherent beliefs about the nature of teaching based on their own experiences. When combined with the real-world of teaching practice, students' established beliefs create conditions that can make it difficult for pre-service teacher education to have an impact (Richardson, 1996). For example, Knowles' (1992) life history study reported that family influences and previous teachers had influenced the pre-service teachers' conceptions of the teacher's role (as cited in Richardson, 1996). Personal experiences of learning in classrooms and observing teaching models, coupled with parental involvement, may contribute to the perception of the teacher-role. Examples of experience with formal knowledge of students entering school are found in school subjects, outside readings, and television. When learning to teach, examples of formal knowledge are exhibited in knowledge of subject matter, and conceptions about the nature of subject matter and how students learn it (Richardson, 1996).

Studies of the origins of teachers' beliefs show that a variety of life experiences will contribute to the formation of strong and enduring beliefs about teaching and learning. Furthermore, the studies suggest that teachers' beliefs should be surfaced and acknowledged during teacher education programs to make a difference in the deep structure of knowledge and beliefs held by pre-service teachers (Richardson, 1996).

#### *Uses and Functions of Beliefs in Teaching*

While beliefs affect all areas of teaching, they are important to note in several ways. Nespor (1997) stated that they are useful in task definition in the cognitive realm because they function as framing or defining the teaching task. Beliefs help in

facilitating memory processing by aiding recall, and the constructive and reconstructive processes. Nespor sums up the uses of beliefs in the following quotation:

The affective and emotional components of beliefs can influence the ways events and elements in memory are indexed and retrieved and how they are reconstructed during recall. Emotion and affect thus have important implications for how teachers learn and use what they learn (p. 324).

Concerning teachers, this quotation refers to how the intricacies of belief systems influence emotions and how learning experiences are perceived. For example, a teacher may find themselves in a particular situation which requires a specific action; recalling a similar situation and their corresponding beliefs may connect them to how they felt and how they acted in order to respond appropriately to the present situation.

Nespor (1987) argues that the contexts and environments within which teachers work, along with the problems they encounter, are ill-defined and deeply entwined, and that they peculiarly suit beliefs for making sense of these contexts. Implications for understanding beliefs suggest that, if the great interest is in why teachers organize and manage classrooms as they do, then consequently, more attention must be made to the goals they pursue and to their subjective interpretations of classroom processes.

Studies have shown that teachers' expectations can significantly influence student behaviour and academic performance (Good, 1987). For example, early in the school year, teachers form differential expectations for student behaviour and achievement. Subsequently, teachers may behave differently towards students, and their actions may convey behavioural and performance expectations (Good, 1987).

Teachers' implicit theory about the nature of knowledge acquisition can also affect the behaviours they use in the classroom, and ultimately, how the students learn from the behaviours. Teachers' beliefs and philosophies about their teaching style will ultimately affect teaching and learning (Good, 1987; Anders & Evans, 1994; Stoddert, 1994, as cited in Fang, 1996). For example, a 1991 study of teacher beliefs and practices in reading comprehension showed that researchers were able to predict how a sample of teachers taught reading comprehension based on analyses of extensive interviews of the teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning (Richardson, 1996). A teacher's particular approach to an issue may have an impact on what the student is learning based on the teacher's beliefs and how they convey them through their actions.

#### *Research on Teacher Beliefs*

Fang (1996) outlined researchers' findings that before the mid-1970s and early 1980s, most studies on teachers' thought processes had an emphasis on teachers' decision-making. Little reference was made to the knowledge of subject-matter upon which they based these decisions. Questions guiding the research consisted of searching from where teacher explanations for their decisions came, how teachers decided what to teach, represented what they taught, and dealt with problems of misunderstanding.

Research on attitudes and beliefs of pre-service teachers illustrated how entering students hold strong images of teachers, both negatively and positively. These images strongly influence how they approach their teachers' education program (Britzman, 1991, as cited in Richardson, 1996).

Past investigations on beliefs has offered logical assumptions that researchers can make when examining teachers' educational beliefs. Pahares (1992) cites the conclusions

that may be used concerning teachers' beliefs, highlighted because of their significance to teaching practices. For example, beliefs are formed early and tend to self-perpetuate, persevering even against contradictions caused by reason, time, schooling, or experience. The belief system has an adaptive function in helping individuals define and understand the world and themselves. They play a critical role in defining behaviour and organizing knowledge and information. Knowledge and beliefs are inextricably intertwined. The nature of beliefs makes them a filter through which teachers interpret new phenomena, such as situations they are unfamiliar with which occur in the classroom. Teachers must understand belief substructures, such as educational beliefs, of their connections not only to each other but also to other central beliefs in the system. Beliefs must be inferred, taking into account the congruence among individuals' belief statements, the intention to behave in a predisposed manner, and the behaviour related to the belief in question (p. 324-326).

Researchers of the examination of teachers' beliefs recommend that studies be done using the qualitative research methodology as opposed to the typically used quantitative methodology. This approach may enable the researcher to gain additional insights into beliefs by examining case studies or oral histories, for example, as they may provide comprehensive ways of understanding the beliefs of teachers (Pajares, 1992). Recommendations to benefit faculties of education include developing procedures for allowing teacher-education majors to examine their own belief systems, making opportunities available to compare teachers' beliefs with those cited as effective in the literature, and examining actual teaching experiences (Ange, Greenwood, & Miller, 1994). They recommend that more research be conducted on beliefs about particular

components of a subject area. For example, a teacher's beliefs about evolution may affect how and what they choose to teach. Also, they recommend that investigations into pre-service teachers' beliefs pertaining to successful learning and teaching (Fang, 1996).

### *Difficulties in Studying Teachers' Beliefs*

Pajares (1992) states that the contested nature of teachers' beliefs has caused difficulties in studying the concept. Beliefs are studied in diverse fields which has resulted in a variety of meanings, and are seldom clearly defined in studies or used explicitly as a conceptual tool. In addition, distinguishing between beliefs and knowledge often has been a daunting task since they have similar meanings and inferences in the literature. For example, Pajares cites Clandinin and Connelly's 1987 study where they examined the origins, uses, and meanings of "personal knowledge constructs" used in studies of teachers' beliefs. Clandinin and Connelly found an array of terms including teachers' teaching criteria, principles of practice, and teachers' conceptions, and suggested that most of the constructs were merely different words meaning the same thing. Pajares states "as such, all belief is viewed as knowledge of a sort" and that influence how individuals characterize phenomena and make sense of the world (p. 309). Nespor (1997) concluded that beliefs are considerably more influential than knowledge in determining how individuals organize and define tasks and problems, and are stronger predictors of behaviour.

It has become widely accepted by researchers that teachers' beliefs play an important role in shaping teachers' patterns of instructional behaviour (Thompson, 1992). Much of the research gathered in this area has focused on reading and mathematics instruction; little has been done to assess what teachers' beliefs are regarding classroom



management and how their beliefs shape their classroom management strategies.

Research into this realm may provide explanations for why teachers choose particular strategies in response to management situations, thus examining the reasons behind their actions.

### *Importance and Significance of Studying Teachers' Beliefs*

According to Richardson (1996), “attitudes and beliefs are important concepts in understanding teachers’ thought processes, classroom practices, change, and learning to teach” (p. 102). If appropriate interventions and meaningful models of a curriculum in teacher education are to be developed, it is important for teacher beliefs to surface and be acknowledged by reflection. Larrivee (2005) states that self-reflection “involves observing our patterns of behaviour and examining our behaviour in light of what we truly believe” and that examining core beliefs is a critical aspect of self-reflection (p. 22). The process of self-reflection raises the level of consciousness and the resulting increase in awareness provides an opportunity to recognize incongruence or imbalance, which effective classroom management necessitates (Larrivee, 2005).

Pajares (1992) states that “attention to the beliefs of teachers and teacher candidates can inform educational practice in ways that prevailing research agendas have not and cannot” (p. 329), indicating that researchers in the past have deemed beliefs as being too “messy” to study. Pajares suggests otherwise, and concludes with the following statement:

When [beliefs] are clearly conceptualized, when their key assumptions are examined, when precise meanings are consistently understood and adhered to, and when specific belief constructs are properly assessed and

investigated, beliefs can be, as Fenstermacher (1979) predicted, the single most important construct in educational research (p. 329).

*Relationships between Beliefs and Actions*

The need for a better understanding of teaching effectiveness is of concern in the teaching realm; researchers acknowledge that teaching is complex, demanding, and uniquely human (Clark & Peterson, 1986). Studies indicate that teacher beliefs “can make or break the learning process,” and researchers are paying closer attention to teacher attitudes and beliefs on students and on the quality of school life (Ange, Greenwood, & Miller, 1994, p. 141). Where personal beliefs are concerned, if the purpose is to define what makes a good teacher, it is necessary to investigate the beliefs of teachers (Ange, Greenwood, & Miller, 1994). For example, good teaching may include being a good classroom manager; being conscious of beliefs may open up the possibility for a greater range of possible choices and responses to classroom situations and individual student behaviours (Larrivee, 2005).

Studies have been done to conduct research that leads to understanding the complexities of teaching contexts and of teachers’ thinking processes and actions within those contexts. Richardson (1996) states that an understanding of a teacher’s practices is enhanced by research attention to both beliefs and actions through interviews and observations. Moreover, this attention may contribute to change in beliefs and practices if the research conducted is done collaboratively. Richardson (1996) also asserts that beliefs are thought to drive actions, with experience and reflection on action possibly leading to changes in, or additions to, beliefs.

Levin et al. (2005) state that beliefs strongly affect one's behaviour; however, experiences and reflection on action may lead to changes or amendments to beliefs. Changes in beliefs are beneficial because having a strong, positive belief system will benefit both the teacher and his or her students. Being aware of the types of beliefs that are positive as opposed to those that need work will help teachers become more effective educators. For example, in terms of producing constructive results in the classroom, a belief in the importance of reflection on the success of a lesson may produce a more positive effect on teaching strategies than a belief which does not include reflection practices. Researchers say that significant change in teachers can only occur if they are engaged in personal exploration, experimentation, and reflection upon their thoughts and actions (Richardson, 1996).

#### *Linking Teachers' Beliefs and Classroom Management*

Several studies have been done that look into the beliefs regarding classroom management style and comparing them with particular demographics; the next section further describes findings. I have selected the following studies because each connect teacher's beliefs to classroom management and demonstrate ways in which they affect one another in the teaching atmosphere.

#### *Teacher Demographics and Classroom Management Style*

Several studies done by Martin, Baldwin, Shoho, and Yin (1992, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1997, and 2000) have investigated differences in classroom management perceptions and beliefs in terms of the following demographics: teachers of different training and age, novice and experienced teachers, teacher personality characteristic, gender, and geography of teachers. For example, Martin and Baldwin (1992) found that

novice teachers differ from and are influenced by those more experienced, regarding their attitudes on discipline. Beginning teachers “appeared to be patient, share responsibility, and interact with students” (Martin & Baldwin, 1992, p. 5), while more experienced teachers “tended to react in a manner that [includes behaviours] insisting on appropriate behaviour, using time-out procedures, [and] punishing students” (Martin & Baldwin, 1992, p. 5). Thus, this finding illustrates how teachers’ attitudes become pessimistic and controlling over time.

The researchers believed the reason for this difference is perhaps experienced teachers are more interventionist because they perceive outside pressure from administrators, parents, and faculty. This causes them to take an active and controlling approach to classroom situations (Martin & Baldwin, 1992). Regarding locus of control, experienced teachers were found to score more internally than pre-service teachers. It appears that years of experience may influence teachers’ perceptions of classroom management style while the locus of control may be a secondary factor (Martin & Baldwin, 1993).

Martin and Baldwin (1994) suggest that their results may imply that novice teachers’ own experiences as students may influence their perceptions of classroom management more than their experiences in pre-service training programs. More experienced teachers may have modified their practices and beliefs to correspond to particular teaching realities and skills learned on the job.

Beliefs regarding classroom management vary among teachers. When they studied particular teacher personality characteristics in relation to classroom management style, Martin, Baldwin, and Yin (1995) found that teachers scoring more interventionist

or controlling on a classroom management-style inventory were often “less venturesome and inhibited, more practical, and more astute and aware of social conventions” (p. 4). Significant relationships between personality characteristics and classroom management style were positive and negative in direction on the scales used, and consistent with expected patterns based on past research (Martin, Yin & Baldwin, 1997).

Regarding gender, Martin, Yin, and Baldwin (1997) reported that no significant differences were found between male and female teachers regarding their attitudes and beliefs on classroom control. The teaching setting (rural or urban) was evidently more of a factor than gender in determining beliefs regarding classroom management style at the high school level researched, yielding more of a difference (Martin, Yin, & Baldwin, 1997).

When researching age, Martin and Shoho (2000) hypothesized that age could account for differences in beliefs concerning classroom management style. They found that traditionally certified teachers and additional certification program participants scored more interventionist than student teachers on both subscales used. Martin and Shoho found that as teachers age, their beliefs and attitudes toward classroom management become more controlling; they assume that most of the older subjects were also likely to be parents. They speculate whether or not it is teaching experience or life experience that causes this difference in the teachers’ attitude. Martin and Shoho also wonder if teachers who are parents approach their classrooms differently from those who are not parents.

They conclude that over the past several years a change in people has occurred who enter teacher preparation programs; they may be older and more diverse. “Because

the non-traditional student teacher is likely to have the benefit of richer life experiences, teacher preparation programs should respond accordingly by tailoring their approach to their student body and abandoning a one-size-fits-all approach” (Martin & Shoho, 2000, p. 12). They found that practical classroom experiences make a difference in teachers’ perceptions and beliefs. More richly developed field training will be more beneficial to alleviate the beginning teachers’ idealism with realism, thus educating about the differences between what teachers believe they know and what actually occurs in existing classrooms. This may include providing more experiences in challenging classrooms so beginning teachers will have the opportunity to manage diverse situations not often discussed in teacher preparation programs.

#### *Summary*

The related literature provides a background for exploring questions guiding this study. For example, regarding teachers developing their beliefs about classroom management, research shows that aspects such as their experiences as a student, their teacher training, their experiences as a teacher and their personal background help to frame their beliefs and actions. Yet, the specifics of what teachers’ beliefs are about classroom management are not completely answered.

The literature states that a connection exists when referring to how teachers reflect upon their beliefs about classroom management in strategies they use with students. This study examines teachers’ viewpoints regarding their beliefs on classroom management and how they see their beliefs affecting the strategies they use.

Overall, my review of the literature demonstrates how classroom management encompasses management of the classroom environment, instruction, and student

behaviour. Teachers' beliefs affect what and how they teach with respect to how they decide to approach classroom management issues and how they convey information to students.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Research Methodology

#### *Introduction*

In this chapter, the method used for obtaining and assessing data is outlined. The first section discusses the approach used for gaining ethical clearance. The second section describes the methodology. The procedures used for data collection and analysis are described in section three. Section four explains the research process regarding the research sites and participants.

#### *Ethical Considerations*

##### *Informed Consent*

At the beginning of each interview, I reviewed the nature of my study with the participants. I assured participants that participation was voluntary. I guaranteed them anonymity and confidentiality and assigned each participant a pseudonym. All interviews were recorded on tape. I explained that I wanted to record the interviews for two reasons: to ensure that I would capture everything that we said, and to make certain that I could give them my complete attention while they were talking. Each participant agreed to be recorded. I then gave them the consent form to review and asked them to sign if they agreed with the statements outlined (see Appendix C). They agreed.

##### *Storage of Data and Dissemination of Results*

The University will securely store all data collected for seven years at which time they will destroy it. The finished thesis will be available in the education library at the University. I will make a summary available to the school board and participants. I have



offered to give a presentation regarding the study to interested school board members and the Faculty of Education.

### *Risks and Benefits*

Participants reported no physiological or psychological risk towards themselves or to third parties affected by the research but not active research subjects (i.e., the students in the teachers' classrooms). Examples of risks may have been stress to participants or interference with students' abilities to learn. Personal benefits for participants may include opportunities to share and express personal experiences, beliefs, and classroom management strategies. Educational benefits may include a greater understanding of teachers' beliefs regarding classroom management and adding to this issue's research literature.

### *Methodology*

This single case study employs qualitative research methodology to explore teachers' beliefs about classroom management. This method is appropriate for conducting an in-depth examination of each participant's beliefs about classroom management. By directly asking practicing teachers about this issue, they were allowed the opportunity to share their views freely. Selected contemporary theorists outlined in the literature review have influenced my interpretational framework by providing an understanding of how the issues of teachers' beliefs and classroom management are interconnected. Studies pertaining to classroom practices in relation to teacher beliefs informed my interpretation of findings by providing information that illustrated how beliefs and classroom management influence, and are influenced by, each other.

### *The Case Study Method*

According to Bogdan and Biklen (2003), case study research involves “a detailed examination of one setting, or a single subject, a single depository of documents, or one particular event” (p. 54). Within this context, I explored teachers’ beliefs regarding classroom management within a classroom setting. Beliefs can be understood as personally constructed entities, thus a case study approach is an effective way to understand teachers’ beliefs from their own perspectives.

Pajares (1992) states that researchers find the “qualitative research methodology [to be] relevant, appropriate, and promising” with regard to studying beliefs (p. 327). Pajares outlined researchers who have suggested that, “although quantitative methods typically have been used in studying efficacy beliefs, qualitative methods, such as case studies or oral histories, are needed to gain additional insights . . .” (p. 327). This statement lends credence to my choice of research method, as I believe the case study method provided an appropriate examination of participants’ perspectives.

### *Data Collection*

I used ethnographic techniques to collect and analyze information about teachers’ beliefs regarding classroom management. Ethnography is used to study events in natural settings and strives to understand how events are perceived and interpreted by the people who participate in them. Specifically, data was collected from each participant through one semi-structured and taped interview accompanied by formal and informal classroom observations. Originally, I proposed to conduct two semi-structured and taped interviews; however, upon further reflection and discussion with my advisor, I decided that it would be more effective if each participant and I decided for the need of a second

interview. The basis for this decision was the fact that the participants provided a thorough discussion and covered each question I provided for them; a second interview seemed irrelevant. Data analysis techniques involved content analysis of interview transcriptions and field-notes. To address respondent validation, I invited participants to review their interview transcripts to add, delete, and clarify their statements.

#### *Semi-Structured and Taped Interviews*

Yin (1994) states that informally-structured interviews are a useful way to gather information about an individual's standpoint concerning a particular issue. Semi-structured interviews include a specific set of open-ended questions that allow respondents to provide a depth of understanding to the topic. The use of informally-structured interviews allowed for unexpected discoveries by me or possibly even the participants that may have pointed toward new directions for the implications of this study. By not directly following a list of interview questions, the informal structure allowed for participants to offer insights about related issues and add to the discussion.

Preceding the interviews, I made participants aware of their rights with respect to ethical issues by stating them. Interviews ranged in length from twenty-five minutes to more than one hour. The interview followed a list of questions to guide conversation (see Appendix D). Participants' responses, in part, determined the direction of the interview surrounding the list of questions. For example, when a participant answered a question which segued into a brief discussion of another related issue.

#### *Informal and Formal Observations*

The observations I conducted for each participant included informal and formal details. My observations were written in point-form and short sentences as thoughts and

observations occurred to me. I wrote my observations on several sheets of paper during and after the classroom observation time while I sat in the back of each classroom.

Between 3 and 4 pages of notes (on single-sided sheets) were taken for each participant.

Examples of informal observations I made included notice of classroom environments, how the students responded to participants, and how relaxed the participants appeared in the classroom. Formal observations documented specific classroom management strategies the participants used in their classrooms. For example, I noted particular approaches to preparation and the ways in which participants kept students on task. Specific observations will be discussed in further detail in the following chapters.

#### *Field-Notes*

I kept several pages of field-notes for each participant over the course of this study. Two forms were used, substantive and analytic/methodological. Substantive field-notes included my personal reflections on the interviews and classroom observations to monitor the interpretation of events and identify potential issues that would need attention (for example, if I felt the participants were comfortable in my presence based on their body language and tone of voice). Analytical/methodological field-notes included information about the research questions based on interview events and classroom observations, such as how the classroom management strategies the participants' spoke of believing in or using were reflected in their classroom during observation.

## *Data Analysis and Interpretation*

### *Data Analysis*

Data analysis was ongoing throughout the collection period and writing of the thesis. I analysed transcribed interviews using the “constant comparative method” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). I examined the interview transcripts for recurring words, ideas, and key phrases that displayed patterns of regularities, which enabled me to apply specific codes to the data document. Recurring themes included definitions of classroom management, references to the importance of teaching experience, and identification of personal beliefs. To underline the words, ideas, and phrases that constituted the codes, I used coloured markers and recorded each emerging theme on a separate document. For example, I used the colour red to underline classroom management definitions and orange for the importance of teaching experience. Then, I applied these codes to all data instruments and organized them accordingly. Next, I assigned the codes to specific categories according to the content of the initially coded data. Categories included definitions and the development of classroom management beliefs. After an extensive investigation of the content of these categories, overall themes emerged. Overall themes consisted of particular definitions, strategies, and factors that influence the development of classroom management beliefs. The inductive analysis of the data fostered the conceptualization of the overall themes that emerged from this study.

### *Data Interpretation*

Neuman (1997) states that a qualitative researcher interprets data by “giving them meaning, translating them, or making them understandable” (p. 335). Interpretation of data refers to the development of ideas about research findings and relating them to the

literature and to broader concerns and concepts (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Bogdan and Biklen outline the process when they state the following:

Analysis involves working with the data, organizing them, breaking them into manageable units, coding them, synthesizing them, and searching for patterns. Interpretation involves explaining and framing [the researcher's] ideas in relation to theory, other scholarship, and action, as well as showing why [the] findings are more important and making them understandable (p. 147)

I used the process outlined by Bogdan and Biklen (2003) as a guide to interpret the results of the interviews and classroom observations. Once I organized the emerging themes from individual transcripts into common categories across the transcripts collectively, I reflected on each of them in relation to the information gathered from each participant. Then, I conceived ways to decipher the findings and relate them to the literature. I compared and contrasted themes with respect to corresponding information outlined in the literature review. For example, a theme I identified was the importance of teaching experience; I searched the sources used in the literature review for similar references to teaching experience to determine how my research connected to the literature.

*Transferability, Reliability and Credibility*

Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that transferability is a measure of a study's usefulness to other researchers. Transferability of this study may be determined by researchers who are interested in this possibility and is "... dependent on the degree of similarity between the sending and receiving contexts" (p. 297). Within this context, researchers interested in my study may use the process employed or the information gathered for their own studies if they so choose.

Bogdan and Biklen (2003) state that researchers of qualitative studies are concerned with the accuracy and comprehensiveness of their data. They view reliability as "a fit between what they record as data and what actually occurs in the setting under study, rather than the literal consistency across different observations" (p. 36). For this study, reliability was reflected in the detailed account of the conduct and context of this research so that others may use this work alongside their own research interests. Each step, from the methods and procedures from the research questions determined prior to the classroom observations to the analysis of results, has been outlined in detail to ensure others may follow and make use of.

To establish the accuracy of information, triangulation was used. Triangulation has come to mean that "many sources of data [are] better in a study than a single source because multiple sources lead to a fuller understanding of the [phenomena studied]" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 107). Credibility of this study was strengthened through a triangulation of multiple data sources which consisted of interviews, observations, field-notes, and personal reflections. To address respondent validation, I invited the

participants to review their interview transcripts. Three of the participants made changes that included grammar corrections and clarifying ideas and deleting incomplete thoughts.

### *The Research Process*

Two schools in a single school board participated in my study; three teachers from the first school, and a fourth from a second school. Following is a description of gaining entry to the sites and selection of the participants.

#### *Gaining Entry to Research Sites*

Once the University Research Ethics Board gave ethical approval for my study, I contacted the district school board where my study would take place, to gain permission and ethical approval. I sent an information package to the board that included the approval form from the University, and an introductory cover letter (see Appendix A). I received board approval and went ahead with contacting Principals about obtaining participants by phone.

Due to time and financial constraints, I chose to interview and observe four participants from the Primary/Junior divisions of two elementary schools. I chose the method of using a number generator to randomly select four schools from a list of schools in the school board to ensure an indiscriminate approach. A number generator found on the internet was used to select 4 random numbers out of 20 (corresponding to the number of elementary schools obtained from the school board's website). I applied the 4 numbers to the list and selected the schools that matched the numbers. My objective in gathering participants was to take the first four teachers who volunteered, whether they were all from one school or one from each. I contacted the Principals of



each school, introducing myself and my study. Three Principals out of the four contacted were interested and said they would notify their staff immediately.

### *Selection of Participants*

The following week, one Principal contacted me and said that three teachers were interested in participating. I went to the school that day to drop off the Cover Letter to Teachers for them to read (see Appendix B). While at the school, one of the teachers interested in participating approached me and we established a day at the end of the week for our interview. As Vice-Principal, she was aware of the other two teachers' schedules and offered to set up interview times with them on the same day.

A second Principal requested a brief meeting where I would outline the specifics of my study. I met with her at the end of the second week. She said she had several teachers in mind and asked me how many participants I needed and from which division. I told her I needed another teacher and would prefer Primary. She contacted the teacher and relayed their name to me; I phoned the school and arranged for an interview and observation with the teacher the following week. Once I had four participants confirmed, I phoned the third Principal, thanked him for his interest in my study, and told him I had enough participants.

### *Summary*

This chapter described the qualitative method used to study teachers' beliefs about classroom management for this study. I outlined ethical considerations and discussed data analysis and interpretation techniques as well as a description of the research process. The following chapter discusses participants' perspectives on their beliefs about classroom management.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Summary of Findings

#### *Introduction*

This chapter provides a summary of the major themes and categories that have emerged from an analysis of the interview transcripts, formal and informal observations, and field notes. The data collection techniques for this study generated a great deal more information than I anticipated in response to the research questions. This material includes insights and unexpected details about participants' beliefs and classroom management strategies.

#### *Participants*

The participants of my study are all teachers at the elementary level and have been given pseudonyms. They range in age from mid-thirty to mid-fifty and each are parents. Three participants teach at the same urban centre school in North-Western Ontario. Anne is the Vice Principal and computer teacher. Anne has experience teaching at the high school and university levels, as well as teaching English as a second language in Asia.

Beth is a teacher of Grade 8 Religious Education, English, math and Grade 7 physical education. Beth has taught at the high school level for many years before she became a teacher at the junior level where she has been for nearly a decade.

Charles is a Grade 8 teacher of Religious Education, English and science. Over the years, Charles has experience teaching individual classes from Kindergarten to Grade 12.

The fourth participant, Dawn, is a Grade 1/2 teacher at a second urban centre school in North-Western Ontario, and has 12 years experience teaching at the primary and junior levels.

### *Categories and Themes*

Data analysis techniques generated four categories regarding participants' beliefs and strategies pertaining to classroom management. Categories consist of: (a) defining classroom management, (b) essential beliefs about classroom management, (c) essential strategies for classroom management, (d) the development of classroom management beliefs, and (e) changes in beliefs and strategies. Table 4.4 outlines categories and related themes:

Table 4.4. Categories and Themes

Category	Themes
1. Defining Classroom Management	a) An important aspect of teaching b) A process
2. Essential Beliefs about Classroom Management	a) Respect b) Students come first
3. Essential Strategies of Classroom Management	a) Being firm and fair b) Preparedness c) Flexibility d) Acknowledging the good that students do e) Enjoyment of teaching
4. The Development of Classroom Management Beliefs	a) Life experiences b) Professional reading and development c) Teaching experience
5. Changes in Beliefs and Strategies	a) Change is necessary for growth b) Change in style happens c) Willingness to change to be effective

### *Defining Classroom Management*

Within the context of defining classroom management the following two themes emerged from the participants' interviews and observations: its importance to teaching,

and its being a process. The participants' definitions described several areas that classroom management encompasses. For example, they reported basic components such as encouraging positive behaviour, organization, creating an atmosphere that is conducive to learning, and how they apply rules and consequences. While the responses from the four participants varied, each discussed how classroom management strongly affected their teaching.

### *An Important Aspect of Teaching*

Throughout the interviews, participants described classroom management as an issue that affected their teaching on a fundamental level; that is, affecting many aspects of their teaching on a daily basis. The importance of classroom management to participants became apparent through classroom observations. During interviews, participants discussed the importance of classroom management in their teaching and I was able to observe classroom management strategies in the classroom that reflected and illustrated their beliefs. It was evident that the participants invested time and effort into learning to manage their classrooms, as they seldom had interruptions that they could not easily handle. I interviewed "Beth," a Grade 7/8 teacher and mother. Beth described the importance of classroom management in the following excerpt.

It's an art to be a good classroom manager, especially in the climate of today's schools with the special needs and the family situations of a lot of students that you're dealing with on a daily basis. They come to school to look for the structure; they come to school to look for the organization, for the discipline. And that's a lot of times, key to teaching curriculum,

because I really am a firm believer that if there's no classroom management you won't teach anything (Interview B, 1).

Beth spoke of how her students are aware of her expectations even when she leaves them with a substitute teacher. In fact, the day of our interview she was acting as Principal and was confident that her students would behave in the classroom. She also mentioned the impact of classroom management on her day:

I think classroom management is what makes my day go 'round. Really, to be honest with you, it's what makes my day go 'round because it's that I take home with me, it's that I think about the most, I put time and energy into how I deal with kids and how I show respect for kids (Interview B, 14).

"Charles," a Grade 7/8 teacher and father, was interviewed during a planning period in the unoccupied Principal's office at his school. He appeared relaxed and seemed very knowledgeable about teaching when we talked beforehand. He enjoys his students and his career (Field Notes C, 1). When observing him in his class, he evidently had a friendly rapport with his students; they responded favorably to his sense of humor and gentle teasing (Observations C, 2). Charles spoke about how important control is for teachers while managing their classroom.

... Teachers have nightmares about losing control. If you don't have control in your classroom, you can't manage the behaviours in your classroom – and there are many of those – then you really can't teach, at least you can't teach effectively . . . . The whole concept of the

democratic classroom – it's a fallacy. You have to run your room; you have to control the room (Interview C, 1).

For Charles, teachers must have control of their classrooms to manage effectively. Teachers are in charge and ultimately are responsible for controlling the expectations for acceptable behaviour.

I met with "Dawn," a Grade 1/2 teacher, at the end of her lunch hour. She described the importance of classroom management for her at the primary level:

... If I don't have their attention while they're working, or if I don't have their attention while I'm giving them the instruction then they won't retain anything, so making sure that I have their attention and they're listening and making sure they're focused and on task at all times (Interview D, 1).

Having the students' focused attention during classroom activities is necessary for Dawn to ensure that her students are learning. At the primary level, this is especially important because children often have less experience with school expectations and routines and need to learn to pay attention during lessons.

#### *A Process*

While each participant gave different responses to her or his definition of classroom management, the issue of classroom management being a process or system was a key theme. The theme refers to how teachers develop a system that works within their classroom management strategies. For example, Beth spoke about classroom management being a process quite often during the course of her interview. It was the first thing she said when asked to define classroom management.

[Classroom management] is a process. It's a process that starts day one of the school year and you gradually introduce an environment that you think is safe for kids. And learned for kids, and it doesn't happen overnight – classroom management, it takes time in terms of your teaching career and also in terms of the school year and in terms of the day. It's not something that happens by nature; you have to work at it (Interview B, 1).

When describing her classroom management style Beth further explained how classroom management is a process that incorporates different styles depending on the situation:

[Classroom management] is a process, and it goes on every moment that you're teaching, even though you don't think, it's going on, it's going on because it doesn't matter what you're doing, you're managing. It could be circulating around the room – that's managing because you're present, all over the place, the kids know you're walking around; you know, it could be standing at the front and teaching a lesson and demanding that nobody talks while you're teaching this concept. I mean, that's managing. It's a dynamic process that's going on all the time and I think you flip back and forth between a style (Interview B, 5).

Charles initially gave a definition of classroom management that referred to creating an atmosphere that is conducive to learning and then added that classroom management is about,

. . . Creating a system within your classroom or classrooms, whether its sets of rules, or very simple rules and routines you follow, that make

learning possible, [and] best suited for most kids in the class (Interview C, 1).

Similarly, when asked what classroom management meant to her, Beth referred to considering students' needs.

. . . Structure, organization, an environment that breeds the ability for each student to work at a level, or achieve at a level, that they are capable of, no matter what their ability or inability is. It means having kids know a routine, it means being flexible (Interview B, 1).

In her discussion about defining classroom management, Dawn mentioned the importance of rules having an impact on the students.

. . . If you have rules, children will learn in a positive way to the best of their ability and in a safe environment. So they have to understand that there are consequences as well (Interview D, 1).

I interviewed "Anne," a Vice Principal and parent, before school began in the morning. Her office was warm and inviting and reflected her friendly demeanor. Two vases of fresh spring flowers added a burst of colour to the room (Field Notes A, 2). In her definition of classroom management, she provided a response from an administrative point of view.

I would see classroom management as an arm of the policies for school discipline and school management. Classroom management is fulfilling your obligation for just yet another space in that school, so that it enhances the policies of the school; it has to, I believe, flow into the policies of the school. It has to meld with it and enrich it so that you don't think you



should be able to close the door, metaphorically, and have a different set of rules, like your own little world in your classroom (Interview A, 1).

For Anne, the notion of teachers being responsible for classroom management outside their individual classrooms is important for teachers to recognize because she believes classroom management is an issue that affects the entire school, not just each classroom separately.

### *Essential Beliefs about Classroom Management*

Each participant held beliefs that guided their classroom management strategies. As with defining classroom management, their beliefs were not identical; however, several important themes emerged that they mentioned throughout their interviews. The themes described here are respect, and the belief that students come first.

#### *Respect*

Anne and Beth believe that respect is a necessary part of classroom management (Interview A, 5; Interview B, 2-4, 12). Mutual respect – the act of treating others and being treated by respect in return – within an atmosphere is something that participants work to foster within their classrooms. According to Anne, classroom management is maintained by mutual respect – treating her students with respect and teaching them to respect her and each other in return. For her, respect can have a large impact on the students' learning.

Classroom management depends, I think, on respect. And if you don't have that for yourself, for your peers, and for your students it's really going to impact on how you find it best to manage your classroom.

Because you can manage your classroom and have all the children sitting

in nice neat little rows and they're too terrified to say boo because you will be sarcastic and denigrating, but that doesn't mean you're managing them . . . . Those children aren't learning, they aren't growing; they're being stunted as far as I can see. It's the other side of classroom management and it does happen. I think you see all spectrums (Interview A, 5).

Respect is something that Beth teaches in her classroom and is the basis for two rules. She recounted how the previous day the school had a special assembly for speeches and her home room was a part of the speech contest. She talked with her class before they went to the gym where they held it and said, "There will be no talking, you will not talk; if you talk you will be removed," and they behaved without incident (Interview B, 2). Beth believes it was because they respect her, and are aware of her respect for them.

. . . I don't ask them to do a lot of things – the rules in my room are very simple: we respect each other and we respect the learning environment. Those are the only two rules, and you can always fall back on 'Is that showing respect for that person? Are you showing respect for me? Are you showing respect for your learning when you don't do your homework?' It's foundational in my classroom, respect based on the Christian value that we foster and nurture here in our school (Interview B, 2).

Later I asked her how she saw her beliefs affecting her students. She discussed how she tried to set an example as a role model to demonstrate the expectations of how she would like them to behave.

. . . I try to be a good person and I treat them how I expect them to treat me and the thing is a lot of times, I'll say, 'What have I done to disrespect you? Why are you disrespecting me right now? What have I done to you? Come and talk to me about that because I really feel you're disrespecting me in front of everybody right now,' and we'll discuss it and [the student will respond], 'I'm, I'm really not' (Interview B, 4).

Beth is a firm believer in treating others how one would like to be treated in return. She lets the children know that she truly cares about them by telling them so and by treating them with respect and consideration through her actions. She has built her classroom on mutual respect for the body, mind, soul and spirit of oneself and of others (Interview B, 12). For her, this goes along with modeling expectations in the classroom.

#### *Students Come First*

The notion that the needs of the student should always come first in the classroom was a theme that arose several times, as well as the idea that students were important; teachers should treat them as such. After discussing Charles' opinion that students come first and are important, I asked him if that was his strongest belief and he agreed. He mentioned that while making the students feel welcome in his classroom was necessary, making them feel like they are important was also a vital strategy (Interview C, 6). He interweaves this with the techniques he uses to maintain control and his beliefs about classroom management.

As difficult as some kids may be, they're still really important to someone, and you have to understand that and I think if you treat kids with dignity – and I say that in a true sense – you pretty much always get that back . . . .

Kids are important. Kids deserve a second chance, and often a third chance, fourth chance, and you have to realize as a teacher – and I do as a teacher and a parent – kids mess up. You have to expect them to make mistakes; you have to explain the mistake to them, explain the consequences, give them another chance and move on (Interview C, 2).

For Charles, knowing that children will make mistakes and being willing to give them chances to correct them is an important part of managing his classroom.

Beth often mentions how classroom management is not for the teacher, but for the students (Interview B, 2). When discussing how she uses herself as a role model for expectations and resolving conflict, she explained how she makes them aware that she thinks of them first:

And so I think it's how I treat them, modeling them behaviour and I'm always telling them 'I'm not asking you to do something that I wouldn't do; or I wouldn't ask my own children to do, or I'm not asking you to behave in a way that's different from what I would expect of myself.' And that's just being straight with them, and right up-front with them, and I find the more honest you are, the more concerned you are, that they know you care, and they know that you're in it for them instead of yourself, and I always tell them 'I don't teach for me.' Because I probably wouldn't do this job if I was in it for myself. You know, 'I'm here for you' (Interview B, 4).

Beth provides for her students the opportunity to understand her intentions when she asks them to do a task. By making her students aware that her expectations

are ones that she believes are important and necessary, she is setting an example based on respect and fairness.

Beth also discussed how she thinks the teacher is the leader of the students and is the deciding factor in establishing the classroom climate. If the teacher is having a difficult day at school, the students feel that and respond in a similar way:

You have a responsibility to the kids. That's who you're responsible to; ultimately, you're responsible to them. You have to know that. And like I say, if you're in teaching for yourself, you're in for the wrong reason because that doesn't pay off. It's not about you. It's not about you. I bet if you if you had fifteen teachers in here listening to me speak, I'd say half of them may not agree with that. You know? As a teacher you know, you can't look at yourself. You've got to look at the kids first. And see how you can fit into what they need. And if its structure, they're going to get it. And if it's firmness, damn you, they're going to get it. If it's everyone needs to be treated differently in order to be fair, they're going to get it. I mean, you decide, within the parameters of what you believe, how you're going to deal with it (Interview, B, 13).

Providing a particular style or teaching approach specific to students' needs is an important part of Beth's management. Fairness to Beth means that she is aware of her students' different needs and addresses them appropriately so that they may learn effectively.

I asked Anne about how she saw her beliefs affecting the classroom management strategies she uses. She replied that her strategies are as diverse as the students in her

classroom (Interview A, 2). She is aware that one set of methods will work brilliantly for one class and may be terrible for another; however, she called the strategies only a part of managing:

As long as you don't forget the child – and that it should never be the teacher's needs, like to be the sage on the stage, or control or power – that if you're looking at what's in the best interests of that child, having to approach a problem, or look from an area that you would have never considered (Interview A, 2).

Anne believes that students' needs are the most important in the classroom and should be the basis for classroom management strategies. For her, a part of effective management includes an awareness of the various needs of her students and knowing what methods will work best for different classes.

The participants believe in respecting their students and in ensuring that the needs of their students come first. These beliefs are priorities for them and they reflect this in their classroom management strategies.

#### *Essential Strategies of Classroom Management*

I found it very interesting to hear about how participants defined classroom management and beliefs about classroom management. After discussing their beliefs, I could see how they were reflected in their strategies and vice versa. It was quite evident to me that the participants practiced the beliefs they referred to. For example, Charles spoke of his belief in having an enjoyable time in the classroom. I observed him effectively using humor with his students, as they responded with laughter and appeared comfortable in his classroom. The strategies the participants mentioned and exhibited the

most often are described as the following themes: being firm and fair, preparedness, flexibility, acknowledgment of the good things students do, and enjoyment of teaching.

### *Being Firm and Fair*

Every participant used the words “firm” and/or “fair” to describe how they managed their classrooms. Anne said she would say an observer would see her classroom management style as “probably strict but probably fair” using a good sense of humor (Interview B, 9). Charles and Dawn simply stated their classroom management styles as “firm, but kind” and “firm but fair,” respectively (Interview C, 3; Interview D, 4). Beth went further to add “friendly” and mentioned how her beliefs got her through the school year.

I’m fair, firm and friendly. Firm, fair, and friendly. That’s somewhat of a model that I live by when I am trying to establish what it is I have to establish in September in order to make it to June effectively (Interview B, 1).

Beth also gave an example of how she talks with her students to ensure that she is being fair with them, which also illustrates how flexible she is.

I think that I am very fair with everybody and I ask my class, ‘Am I being fair here? Because if I’m not, let me know. Do you think this counts as fair?’ – ‘Yeah, we do,’ – ‘Okay, great, I had to know that;’ and we talk about it and if it’s not fair, [they have to] let me know. They might say, ‘I don’t think it’s fair that you’re giving us an assignment due next week because, you know what, we have three assignments due then,’ – ‘Okay, so what are we going to do about it? What’s fair then? The next week?’

Or, three days later? Instead of having it due on the Friday, let's have it due on the Monday, three days later?' – 'Yeah, that would be better,' – 'Okay, let's do it.' It's still going to get handed in (Interview B, 12).

Opening up a dialogue with her class and asking for students' input is important for Beth. Her purpose is to ensure that students are aware that she is acknowledging their needs and is willing to accommodate them.

When observing the participants in the classroom, I could see evidence of firmness and fairness. For example, during her computer class, when the students were supposed to be working on a music class project by creating a poster about their favourite musical band or musician, Anne noticed a student who was not working and asked her why. The student appeared not to be concerned with the project; she replied that she had nothing to do. After having the student check with the music teacher about what she needed to work on, Anne sat across from her at a desk and spoke to her firmly about the need to get the project started. She took the time to leaf through the students' music notes to see how far she was and suggested a plan for her to follow. I found this to be a fair way to deal with the situation, as she could have easily gotten frustrated and gave her extra work to do. Instead, Anne took immediate action to resolve the problem by giving the student the opportunity to approach the assignment with a new plan (Observation A, 1).

Charles allows his home room students the first five minutes of class to talk and move about the room before the bell rings. He explained to me, later, when the students were working, that he felt giving them "time to be kids" was important, getting it out of their system before he starts teaching. When they have had their time, he firmly says



“Thank you.” Then he raises his voice slightly, a cue to which they quickly respond and get their notes ready for the class (Observation C, 1).

### *Preparedness*

Each participant in this study showed that preparation was an important strategy in classroom management. For example, teaching at the primary level brings added responsibility for having an assortment of supplies available and organized for use at any given time for various activities. Dawn had a craft for Mothers Day planned the day I came to observe her. The level of it impressed me. For art, the Grade one and two students were making picture frames to give to their mothers or loved ones out of brightly coloured, ready-made foam frames with pictures they had previously illustrated. However, before the craft, Dawn made sure to read a book honouring grandmothers, besides a traditional Mothers Day book, so a student who had no mother in her home would not feel left out. She had separated the frames by colour, in piles at the front of the room. A large round basket with sections in it contained small, matching-coloured felt shapes such as stars, circles, flowers, and squiggly lines. The back of the frames and shapes had a plastic backing that they could peel.

Students were handed their pictures. Dawn ensured they had their name printed on the back when they handed them in. Then, they were called up to the front by group to select frames and a dozen small shapes to decorate it. She asked me to help put masking tape on the back of the frames to cover the sticky part; I enjoyed the opportunity to walk around the room and praise their creative efforts. The craft, which could easily have resulted in a mess of glue and scrap paper, was completed with ease and minimal clean up because of preparation and organization (Observation D, 2)

As a science teacher, Charles talked about his high tolerance for constructive noise and his expectations for the class in being very hands-on with equipment.

... There's a lot of things happening so I have to be aware that things are going to be dropped and fall, and there's going to be kids bumping into each other, there are things happening, there's going to be kids playing around with equipment in the wrong way and things are going to happen – I expect that to happen, so in that way, I think the kids are always really busy and being busy they're kind of happy and there isn't really a lot of chances for them to get themselves into jams because they're doing things, they're following sets of procedures. But, at the same time I expect noise, I expect a little bit of chaos at times and I encourage open communication while we're working all the time (Interview C, 3).

I observed his tolerance for noise as he asked his students to redo their haiku assignments (a second chance to improve on their first attempts). He allowed them to ask their neighbors for advice; the atmosphere got lively, yet he monitored it for constructiveness by walking around the room and making sure they were on task (Observation C, 2). As well, Charles had written the agenda for the class on the front board so the students could follow along and know what they would be doing. The class ran smoothly (Observation C, 1).

Beth offered a different look at being prepared with a strategy if situations change.

You have to realize that you have to accomplish something over the course of a period. And, you have to accomplish something for yourself

too, and you have a curriculum to follow and you have to accomplish that. And, you've also got feelings to manage, and, you know, all those kinds of things that the kids bring, the problems that these kids have, et cetera, et cetera. So yes, it can change . . . and it does – it flip-flops from class to class – your style – and it changes over the course of a period depending on what's happening and so you have to be prepared to deal with that and you have to be prepared to do that, and you can't be afraid to do that. You have to know when to do it; I mean, if you wait too late to regain control so to speak, you might have some problems on your hands. You have to know the point at which, 'You know what? This is too loud in here right now. You know what? I don't like what I'm seeing here right now.' You have to know when to stop everything, 'Pencils down. We have to talk about what's happening right now because I'm not happy with it.' So, yes, it's a dynamic that changes from day to day, from class to class, from year to year, from month to month, and you have to be prepared to do that and to deal with that (Interview B, 6).

When managing her classroom, Beth believes that it is important to focus on the changes in atmosphere that occur and will modify her management strategies to correspond with them. For Beth, being prepared with a variety of management approaches is necessary to effectively manage her classroom.

When discussing her style of classroom management, Anne mentioned that being prepared and always having meaningful work for her students to do was an effective strategy because effective instruction supported appropriate behaviour.

I'm very organized and I mean, that comes down to managing a class well because if a kid is bored, [they are] going to get into trouble. If a kid is not engaged, [they are] going to get into trouble . . . . But I think if they have something to be doing, I think that if you're well prepared to say, 'Okay, you know what, we'll see how this one goes, we'll try that.'

Basically, quite often when I walk into a classroom I have enough work for a couple of weeks; and it's not busy work, and kids know that; they're not stupid. If you're really well prepared the kids know it, and that's a sign of respecting your profession as well, and respecting your kids. And they know that. So I think that's really a key part of classroom management. And, having work – relevant work – for the kids to be doing (Interview A, 9).

For Anne, having alternative and extra work for students is an effective classroom management strategy for preventing misbehaviour because it decreases the amount of time students have to be bored, thus focusing on other matters.

### *Flexibility*

According to participants, consistency with rules and subsequent consequences for breaking rules is an important part of classroom management. However, the ability to be flexible with certain aspects is also desirable to make the classroom environment run effectively. Situations may change often and a willingness to accommodate may help teachers manage effectively because they are demonstrating fairness to students. Charles mentioned that students like consistency and parameters (Interview C, 2). Anne stated that her beliefs mean that she is very flexible (Interview A, 2). Flexibility is something

that Anne incorporates into her classroom management style in terms of being open to different ideas and students' input.

When asked to describe her classroom management style, Beth defines hers as a "double-edged sword," where there are times that she needs to be very autocratic and in control as the leader, and other times where she gives the responsibility to her students.

So, my style changes depending on what's happening. I mean, you could have a situation all of a sudden erupt where you revert back into the other style because you have to, it dictates that you have to. And then, there are other times when you can sort of let yourself take less of a role and put more responsibility on the students. And, I'm not sure what kind of style that would be; I think you always have to be cognizant of the fact that at one point in time things happen to change. It's never static; classroom management is not a static process (Interview B, 5).

Beth's classroom management style is flexible depending on the context of the situation. She is prepared with strategies that allow students to take initiative in being responsible, and strategies that have her in control. Beth is aware that classroom management involves adapting to changes in situations, and being prepared is a part of effective management.

The importance of being flexible was further explained when Beth discussed how others may perceive her classroom management style:

... As structured as it is, you have to be flexible. You have to get off track once in awhile. 'Okay, now, where were we? Okay, now that was a good discussion, I'm glad that we went on that vein.' Like in math, we

could be talking about Pythagoras, because we're taking the Pythagorean Theorem, and then we get off on a tangent on famous mathematicians -- and there's nothing wrong with that. Did the structure break down? No, you know. Did the organization of the classroom breakdown because you got on a tangent about something else? No. You have to be flexible in what you're trying to do with the kids, where you get the most out of the learning environment and [it] becomes a very worthwhile discussion (Interview B, 7).

Clearly, Beth welcomes the opportunity for creative class discussions that have moved slightly away from the original issue if they are meaningful. She believes that there is a value in related departures from issues being discussed, and encourages this type of learning.

Beth also recalls a time when her belief about taking care of ones' physical health was challenged. A parent came to her and said that the seven-minute run during physical education is hard on her son who is overweight. Although Beth believes it is important for her students to run that long, she was accommodating with her expectations. She came to a compromise with the mother where her son could start with running a few minutes during physical education and, with her encouragement, try to reach the seven minutes (Interview B, 11). Working with the students' abilities and what is feasible for them is an important part of teaching for Beth. With respect to classroom management, her flexibility ensures that students are not left out and remain a part of the learning experience and environment.

*Acknowledging the Good that Students Do*

In her interview, Beth talked about the importance of students feeling appreciated by teachers.

. . . Students have to realize that they are appreciated by their teacher and sometimes we don't take the time to do that. And that's effective classroom management because you're giving them some feedback on *them* [italics added]; not on their work, on *them* [italics added] (Interview B, 2).

Later in the interview, Beth expressed that how a teacher behaves and what she presents is going to be the biggest influences on students.

. . . They will remember how you were how you treated them. Not *what* [italics added] you treated them – *how* [italics added] you treated them. And, kids come back to tell you, you know? They don't remember something that you did on the board; they remember you saying 'Congratulations, that was a great job at the math Olympics on the weekend.' They remember what you say to them and how you treated them, not what you teach them (Interview B, 10).

When discussing his classroom management style, Charles spoke about the importance of incorporating elements of enjoyment while doing activities. He thought that one of the ways to do that is acknowledging the good things students are doing. He recalled his favourite teachers influencing him.

I guess you always think back to your favourite teachers. I've had both male and female teachers that I've really enjoyed . . . and I guess that's

the kind of things that you remember, and you kind of model that . . . .

And you remember, too, and I'm sure you do as well, when a teacher said to you, 'You did good .' You know, [and they] made a big deal about it, so you kind of remember to do that with your own students (Interview C, 4).

I observed Charles encouraging his students who were working on revising their haiku. He walked around the room looking at their work and praising their efforts, while at the same time ensuring they were on task (Observation C, 2).

Anne had a touching story to share about a once troubled student that illustrated how acknowledging the positive can make a difference to a student. She called a student to her office, a frequent visitor due to misbehaviour. Anne got his mother on the speakerphone. His mother was exasperated, thinking it was more bad news. Anne then told her that her son had really shown what a good citizen he could be in the school. That comment brought tears from the mother, from her son, and even from Anne herself. I found my own eyes welling up at Anne's description of the events and of how that student has never stepped a foot out of line since that meeting. Anne said that it is so important to really pay attention, catch those moments and then reinforce all the positives because the students crave it (Interview A, 8).

### *Enjoyment of Teaching*

Participants appeared to enjoy their roles as teachers. Their enthusiasm and respect for their students was unmistakable. Dawn was friendly and calm (Field Note D, 1). When I observed her teaching, I sensed that her classroom was a comfortable atmosphere (Observation D, 1).



Charles discussed how having an element of enjoyment in classroom activities is a part of his classroom management style.

I think that a lot of other people would hope they could get into this kind of [open] style because it's very comfortable and the kids enjoy it, and you can see that . . . . I've had a teacher who said fun is the ticket – if you're not having fun, they're not, so make sure you make it fun. Now, realistically, it's not fun six periods a day, it's not all fun, fun, fun, but you can have fun while you're doing things (Interview C, 3).

Charles' students appeared to enjoy the classroom activities. After watching a science video, I observed them laughing and eagerly responding to Charles' challenge of finding the most correct answers from their question sheet in order to win a reward of stretching time (Observation C, 1-2).

While observing Anne in her classroom, I noticed her sense of humor and rapport with her students. The way she smiled and laughed with her students, indicated to me that she enjoyed being there (Observation A, 1-2).

Beth's excitement for mathematics was evident to me while observing her teach. The animated way she spoke while explaining and reiterating new concepts kept the atmosphere light and pleasant. I found this to be an effective way to keep the focus off the difficult nature of the new concept for her students; they appeared to be relaxed and comfortable with her (Observation B, 1-2).

### *The Development of Classroom Management Beliefs*

Based on my research, teachers' beliefs about classroom management originate from a wide variety of sources and influences – those that take place before they are

practicing teachers and those that take place over the course of a teaching career.

Participants were asked about the development of classroom management beliefs and the following themes emerged from their responses: life experiences, professional reading and development, teaching experience, changes in beliefs and strategies, and the necessity for change.

### *Life Experiences*

Each participant mentioned how particular life experiences helped develop their beliefs. Anne had experience teaching on three different continents, and assumes that she is more tolerant and understanding as a result (Interview A, 2-3). Being a parent is also a factor for her.

I think it comes from life experiences; what you are bringing to the profession, where you are currently in your life. For example, I have two teenage daughters, I mean, so where I am and what my beliefs are certainly very different from someone who's a young man living at home with their mom. Their perception of children will be quite different than what mine are, because I have them at home and I live with them. Right?

And for some, children will be a foreign entity (Interview A, 4).

Charles stated that his beliefs about classroom management came from thinking back to his favourite teachers and the qualities that he admired such as calmness, flexibility, and consistency (Interview C, 3). As well, being a parent and raising his own children has contributed to his beliefs, in addition to his own parents who were firm, kind, and advocates of second chances (Interview C, 4).

Dawn discussed how student teachers walk into the classroom often being unable to deal with students that are disrupting a lesson. She stated that teaching experience was the “number-one” influence on developing her beliefs about classroom management (Interview D, 6).

#### *Professional Reading and Development*

Keeping current with professional reading and advancing their knowledge in classroom management and teaching was an important factor that all participants mentioned with respect to how they developed their classroom management beliefs. For example, Dawn spoke of how the following have contributed to the development of her beliefs: school board workshops, classroom discipline books that the school provides, and the influence and commitment of her Principal, a strong advocator of positive classroom discipline (Interview D, 5).

Charles referred to a document the school board provides which deals with classroom issues and problems by illustrating solutions step-by-step. He spoke about this document while discussing his experiences of having student teachers in his classroom, how he found that practicing and demonstrating the skills were helpful to him. The document appeared to be something that Charles found useful, especially for inexperienced teachers whom he believes need to learn to deal with problems in their classrooms and follow the prescribed steps before sending the issue to administration (Interview C, 5).

#### *Teaching Experience*

Teaching experience in the classroom is a way for teachers to get more comfortable and capable with classroom management issues. Anne believes that very

little can surprise her because of her diverse teaching experiences (Interview A, 2-3). Before our interview, Charles asked me why I decided to pursue a Master of Education degree. At the end of our interview, he advised me to get experience teaching and become familiar with the classroom atmosphere before going into administration. He stated that experience from all levels is beneficial, and referred to how teaching at all levels, from kindergarten to Grade 12, has been interesting for him (Interview C, 7).

Experience with teaching is a strong contributor to Beth's beliefs about classroom management. She emphasizes how imperative it is with respect to improving as a teacher.

It's experience that makes you understand classroom management, and allows you to move forward with your classroom management in terms of the mistakes that you've made. You have to know that you're going to make mistakes in classroom management, and some mistakes are big mistakes, some mistakes are small mistakes – but learn by your mistakes because experience with that is the best teacher (Interview B, 10).

She recalls that she made a number of “big mistakes” when she was a young teacher and that she learned from them, answering to parents, students and colleagues. She stated that even seasoned teachers make mistakes with classroom management. However, beginning teachers have to learn to get better by experiencing situations.

I think that's why it's hard for young teachers because they don't have any tools in their tool kit to deal with discipline problems that pop up in a classroom. There are really tough kids who think nothing of standing up in front of everyone and swearing at you and walking out. You know,

they just don't have the tools to deal with that . . . . and then it's a blow up. Whereas a seasoned teacher, I mean, you kind of learn by what you've seen, what you've heard, what you've experienced; talking to people and then developing a style for yourself that works (Interview B, 7).

She also insists that experience is the best teacher and discusses how her beliefs are intertwined with experience.

My belief system is based on something that's innate in me, and that drives me to be the person that I am – however, classroom management is something that you learn to implement based on your own belief system. Which has to be malleable. I mean, you learn about yourself over time as well, and yes, you can change, but experience with classroom management is, I believe, the best teacher of classroom management, and you will bring to that management your belief system about your ideas about the learner and what your philosophy is about learning. It will be fueled by your beliefs based on what you believe about the physical being, mental being, emotional being, spiritual being, and intellectual being (Interview B, 10).

### *Changes in Beliefs and Strategies*

Participants' responses about whether their beliefs have changed since they were beginning teachers varied, yet each participant had something to say about how specific life changes affected the development of their beliefs and strategies about classroom management. Participants expressed the value of experience, in terms of affecting beliefs

as they matured and learned. Charles stated that his beliefs have changed and gave an example of how the wisdom of a superior helped him see his students more realistically.

Yes, [my beliefs] have [changed], in terms of my expectations of students.

I remember my first or second year trying over and over again with a certain set of students to try and teach them long division, having them in before school, at recess, at lunchtime, after school – and finally my Principal came and said, ‘You’ve been at this with this group of kids for like, 12 sessions; that’s enough. Some of them are never going to get it, some of them won’t get it this year, they’re just not ready to get it, so move on,’ I think at that point it kind of clicked on me; everybody in front of me isn’t an academic, and school, per say, is not for every kid that’s in my classroom, and a good number of them are going to go straight to the workplace, and you know, the sooner the better for them because of their lack of skills in reading and math and/or people skills. But, that aside, to understand that doesn’t make them less worthy of respect, because they’re going to find a place in society, they’re going to do a job, they’re going to pay taxes [and] be a good citizen. It happens. You know, some of the kids that you kind of shake your head and [think] jail. They turn out okay, you know; the kids grow up and they turn out okay (Interview C, 4).

Charles’ expectations changed from presuming that every student should understand long division, to realizing that students will succeed at their own pace. He stated that, at this point, he hoped his beliefs and strategies would not continue to change the more he teaches, because they work for himself and his students (Interview C, 5).

Beth stated that she sees her belief system as static, yet the presentation of the belief system is dynamic. What the issues are in front of her and with what she is dealing with precipitates this (Interview B, 10). For example, situation-specific circumstances may bring about a particular method of handling a classroom management issue. She discussed how getting older affects how she looks at things.

I think that no matter how old you are – you know the saying ‘You can’t teach an old dog new tricks?’ Well, I think that’s right with respect to some things about classroom management, but I think there’s another side to classroom management that dictates that you have to, because as you get older you think differently, you act differently, therefore you must come across differently. And, I find now I’m a better manager, I have changed as a manager. I think less of myself as a manager and more of the kids. Whereas my first few years of teaching I thought more about myself and less about the kids. I think that pretty much sums it up, how my classroom management has changed because I’m not in this for me anymore. At the beginning you’re in it for you, you want to survive, you want to be the best you can be, and it can backfire if you don’t go about it the right way, though, once again, I have way more tools in my tool kit now to deal with kids, to deal with myself; and you know, you learn by your mistakes (Interview B, 8).

Anne has seen her beliefs change in a similar fashion and described how learning more is something she realizes is important.

My beliefs probably changed to a certain point, but maybe just being more aware of how individuals learn. I think I still have the core belief there that's my job as a teacher to lead them and to guide them and, in a Catholic system, to provide spiritual guidance as well. More and more, I've come to the realization that there is *so* much more I need to learn (Interview A, 3).

She attributes age, experience, and being current regarding readings as well as shifts in pedagogy as having affected changes in her beliefs throughout her career (Interview A, 3).

Dawn stated that her beliefs have changed since she was a beginning teacher. She explains how a part of society has been a large influence on her personal classroom management style.

For sure, [my beliefs have changed]; I'd have to say yes. And how they've changed, I think – and I even look back to myself with my teachers when I was young, and I think that, not so much the media, but television and whatnot was a big part of how the passive learners now, I guess you could say, [are] in front of the television and their Game Boys, and they need a lot of stimulation and I find myself having to compete with that! You know, you try to find a lesson that's exciting for them and kind of keep them on task and I'm finding that I need to basically do back-flips! (Interview D, 6).



With the school board initiating new programs and curriculum expectations for teachers to follow, Dawn thinks that her beliefs will continue to change. She believes that keeping up with the changes in programming is important (Interview D, 7).

*Change is Necessary.* Wanting to learn more and being open to change coupled with new ideas was a topic that came up several times throughout the interviews. Themes that emerged were: seeing a change in their classroom management style developing over time; and, willingness to change.

*Change in Style Will Happen.* The participants who described their past classroom management style did so by referring to it as being different than the style they currently have. When Beth first started teaching, she described herself as a “control freak” (Interview B, 8). I observed her classroom style to be relaxed, yet she always appeared to have control over what was going on in the classroom. By giving her students expectations and a task to do, they were always occupied (Observation B, 2). She explained how experience and reflection have changed her as a teacher and individual.

I think when I first started teaching, I was a control freak . . . . and then the communication with the kids didn't come across, and that's how I wouldn't want it to come across. It wasn't in sync with who I was. I was trying too hard to manage. And I managed the wrong way a lot of times – not totally wrong all the time, but when I think back to my first year or two or three of teaching, in reflection I didn't like myself, when I look back. I like myself more now, with respect to classroom management.

But there are still some things about my management that I would like to change (Interview B, 8).

Anne stated that when she first started teaching she was very authoritative. She referred to how young teachers can be insecure due to their lack of experience and how it affected their development of skills (Interview A, 2-3).

It's a sign of insecurity [being authoritative]. We have a steady period of being very rigid, having these very, sort of non-bending rules that are cast in stone. I think that there's probably something that's more a mark of the younger teacher coming in, that probably you have to go through that phase to get confidence in your teaching, because you can't teach if there is no control . . . . Managing your classroom means paying attention to every individual there – but you often don't get to this point for awhile. It takes time (Interview A, 3).

Anne's students appeared comfortable in the classroom. They were very receptive to Anne's suggestions and listened attentively to what she said (Observation A, 1).

For Anne, the concept of classroom management has changed over the last decade. She looks at it more as school management and believes that it is important to get away from the idea that teachers are responsible only for their own classroom – where they can close their door and as long as they manage their class, everything will be fine (Interview A, 1). For Anne, school management involves being aware of and involved in what happens outside of one's classroom.

*Willingness to Change to be Effective.* The importance of learning and growing was a topic that several participants discussed. Dawn mentioned how differences in

programs since she was a student have made changing outlooks concerning management issues important for teachers.

. . . Going by our new math programs and the new literacy programs that are coming up, they are allowing more time for students to have more discussions and talk with each other – as opposed to when I was going through school, it was like pencil-and-paper activities, and sit at your seat and don't talk and that was it. Just teaching with some of the other teachers nowadays and they just can't seem to get used to the new programs, it's, 'No. I don't allow my students to go and talk, you know, when they're working they should be doing this,' – it's like, you know what, it's time for a change. You've got to keep up with it (Interview D, 7).

Referring to the different classroom dynamics of students, Anne mentioned the importance of having a fair and effective discipline policy to help provide for a safe school. She also stated that teachers should be willing to change to be more effective classroom managers.

. . . I think classroom management isn't going to be effective for a class, a school, or the system unless teachers are willing to change . . . . You are going to have those who won't change, who will refuse to change. And you're going to have some parents who are going to think that, no matter what you tell them, that their children are angels and couldn't possibly do anything wrong. You're always going to have those extremes, so I think it's a way of finding a means to cope with those extremes, finding a way

that those extremes don't take over and become the norm. And, you allow them to then sway all the judgments that you are making. So I think that as long as you do have a core – core values and core beliefs, and I think they're the intangibles, they have to be the unchangeables too, so that how you do something may change, but your belief that all people must be respected never does. I think that's important, I think maybe that's how we can get, sort of teachers, well, that's how I try to look with teachers, that I don't want to change their beliefs, just, another road of getting down to the same destination, maybe another way that we can look at doing that (Interview A, 9, 10).

For Beth, being prepared to change and accepting of change is important for teachers to make their classroom run efficiently.

... I think as much as classroom management is a dynamic process, you have to stay dynamic yourself. You can't be static, you can't think, you know, I'm not going to change very much, you know? You can mold yourself, you can change to adapt to the certain nature of the classroom that you're teaching. Some of us are more willing to do that than others, and when you become hardened in the way that you are, as a teacher, I think that fosters a grief problem for yourself (Interview B, 8).

### *Summary*

I came away from the interviews and observations having learned more than I could have hoped about effective classroom management strategies and ways in which beliefs about classroom management influence strategies. In this chapter, I discussed

teachers' beliefs about classroom management using the words of the participants.

Specifically, how teachers' beliefs about classroom management are defined, how they develop and influence management strategies, and how they change over time.

Findings identify several important factors. Participants defined classroom management as an ongoing process and an important aspect of teaching. They identified respect and the idea that students' needs must come first as beliefs regarding classroom management. Concerning management style, they identified managing their classrooms in a firm and fair manner, being prepared and flexible, and acknowledging the good that students do as essential strategies. Their enjoyment of teaching was evident.

Beliefs about classroom management developed through life experiences, professional reading and academic development, and most significantly, teaching experience. Participants saw change as necessary to becoming effective classroom managers.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Discussion

#### *Introduction*

#### *Restatement of the Problem*

The purpose of this study is to investigate teachers' beliefs about classroom management. This chapter will explore and describe how a group of teachers understand their beliefs about classroom management. The analysis provides an overview of teachers' beliefs about classroom management with respect to how they are defined and developed, and what factors influence them. The literature outlined in previous chapters is used to compare and contrast with the findings. To summarize, I will examine the research questions in relation to the findings.

#### *Revisiting the Literature*

The purpose of bringing together the literature and findings is to discover similarities and differences among information sources while considering ways in which one can learn from the other. I will examine the findings by briefly reviewing the literature with the following foci derived from the headings used in Chapter Two: defining classroom management, defining teachers' beliefs about classroom management, the development of teachers' beliefs about classroom management, and how their beliefs affect their strategies. An overview of responses to the research questions will follow.

#### *Defining Classroom Management*

The meaning of classroom management is contested. Many teachers and theorists have their own interpretation of what classroom management means. One may define the term classroom management differently, depending on an individual's

perspective. Similarly, within the context of defining classroom management, each participant gave a different response. Participants reported having control, encouraging positive behaviour, organization, creating an atmosphere that is conducive to learning, and how rules and consequences are applied. Beth and Charles stated that classroom management was about creating an environment that was safe and conducive to learning for most students. Dawn discussed the importance of having her students' attention while instructing. These components are consistent with Crehan's (1994) outline of three main dimensions of classroom management, which are: managing instruction, managing room arrangement, and managing student behaviour. Teachers may work to be knowledgeable and proficient with each one of the dimensions in order to provide a positive learning environment for students. Research shows that teachers who approach classroom management as a process of establishing and maintaining effective learning environments will be more successful than teachers who emphasize their roles as authority figures (Good and Brophy, 1994). Through interviews and classroom observations, each participant demonstrated that providing a positive learning environment was an important aspect of classroom management; according to the research, the participants' approaches to classroom management may be considered more successful than teachers who do not place a high value on learning environments.

*Classroom Management Style.* Levin, Nolan, Kerr, and Elliot (2005) outlined three main theories of classroom management as points on a continuum that move from one end to the other: student-directed, collaborative, and teacher-directed practices. Differences among the theories included a variety of issues, such as who has the primary responsibility for management, what the goal of management is, and what relationships

exist within the management system. While it is natural to see a combination of aspects from each of the theories, Levin et al. (2005) state that it is usually possible to classify teachers' general approach to working with students and goals for classroom management into one of the three theories.

Consistent with the literature, the participants demonstrated classroom management styles that were consistent with one particular theory, while at the same time showing characteristics of another. Their observable characteristics and comments were indicative of a collaborative method; for example, Beth places a high emphasis on mutual respect between herself and her students, which is important for the goal and relationships of collaborative management. Beth also uses rewards for motivation; she talked about "Food Friday" which goes with "Problem Solving Friday," where everyone gets a treat after they write their math problems (Interview B, 14). Rewards are consistent with interventions of the teacher-directed method. Beth's use of treats may be interpreted as being a way to encourage good behaviour while at the same time getting the students excited about math.

Charles and Dawn both mentioned rules and consequences, terms that referred to interventions used with the collaborative method (Interview C, 1; Interview D, 1). Illustrating another method, Charles expressed the importance of showing his students that he cares about them, which is a part of the relationship aspect of student-directed management. Similarly, Dawn allows her students freedom in terms of movement around the classroom and productive noise, which associates with the provision of student choice of the student-directed model.



*Principles for Effective Classroom Management.* Much is involved with managing one's classroom. A need exists to look beyond the notion that controlling behaviours is the most important aspect of classroom management. In some situations, teachers may see their students' actions as threatening to their person and are subsequently not confident in their abilities to use effective strategies to resolve situations (Larrivee, 2005). The literature is reflected in an example from Beth, who described how a student of hers with Oppositional-Defiance Disorder shouted and swore at her in class one day (Interview B, 16). She stated that it is important to not take such situations personally and to control one's reactions to conflicts. She explained that students in her class are watching how she responds and she believes they will respect her more for handling situations calmly and patiently.

Levin et al. (2005) state the importance of teachers using techniques to manage student behaviour that are consistent with their beliefs about how students learn and develop. The literature is supported by the fact that every participant demonstrated that they have grounded the strategies they use in classroom management in the beliefs they have about teaching. For example, Beth firmly believes in respect. She has made it the basis for the only two rules in her classroom. By making respect such an important aspect of her classroom management approach, she is also modeling the behaviours that she expects her students to use in return, thus illustrating her belief in treating others as one would like to be treated.

Another example of beliefs being consistent with techniques is how Charles believes in giving students second chances. I observed him provide for his students the opportunity to rewrite the haiku poems they were working on in English after reading

their first attempts. He felt that they could improve their poems; he did not want to penalize them for their initial work, alternatively giving them the benefit of more time and reflection with his encouragement. The realization that children will make mistakes is an important belief of Charles' and that children are important. He mentioned the value of allowing students to make mistakes while providing an explanation for consequences and the opportunity to have a second chance, and move on. Charles' view also reflects Kohn's (1999) assertion that students should be aware that making mistakes is an important part of learning. Leading students to explore and challenging them is a part of this concept, and helps to put the positive emphasis on *what* students are learning as opposed to the more traditional emphasis on *how* they are learning (as cited in Charles, 2005).

A belief of Anne's that was apparent in her actions was her beliefs in managing with a sense of humour. This trait was evident during her classroom observation as she smiled often and laughed with her students during their computer class. Even while ensuring that the students focused on the work she asked them to do, Anne used a light and friendly tone. The students laughed along with her, showing that they were comfortable in her classroom and her presence.

Similarly, Dawn's belief in the importance of acknowledging the different backgrounds of her students was observed in her actions when, for a Mother's Day activity, she read a book that honoured grandmothers for the student in her class without a mother at home. Dawn understands that her student's home environment affects them both in and out of the classroom. This illustrates how being aware of students' situations

outside of the school realm may make it easier for students to feel included and comfortable in the classroom.

### *Defining Teachers' Beliefs about Classroom Management*

The participants defined their beliefs about classroom management with a variety of responses that emphasize their dedication to effective teaching. They pointed out that classroom management is an important aspect of their teaching; both Dawn and Beth affirmed that the process begins with the first day of school in September and progresses throughout the school year, illustrating how much attention they give this aspect. This is consistent with literature by Richardson (1996), who explains that beliefs and attitudes are a subset of a group of constructs that name, define, and describe the structure and content that drives a person's actions. Dawn and Beth's beliefs about the importance of classroom management affect their teaching throughout the entire school year, thus driving their actions in the classroom.

A second example of a belief that drives actions is the belief in respect. Respect is a belief that the participants strongly subscribed to – respect for and from their students, for their peers, and for the teaching profession itself. Anne stated that she bases classroom management on mutual respect; Beth strives to model it to her students. Teaching and modeling respect to students will help them to become honest and courteous citizens. It was evident that the participants respected their students and their students respected them in return. For example, at the beginning of the school day, Charles warmly greeted his students coming into the classroom; he was met with smiles and friendly responses. Anne's students never questioned the work schedule she outlined for them; they knew what the expectations were for their computer class and she did not

have to remind them to get to work. The participants' belief in teaching respect in the classroom was seen in their behaviour towards their students and in how their students responded to and regarded them in return, illustrating how a belief may drive an action.

Further illustrating the literature, each participant also demonstrated the belief that students come first. The caring nature of the participants was evident in the interviews and observations, as well as the importance of considering the needs of their students. Beth spoke several times about the fact that, for her, teaching is not about the teachers, it is about the students; she tells them that she is doing it for them. Charles stated that students come first for him; he also emphasized that no matter how difficult they can be, they are important and deserve to be treated with dignity. The way in which I observed Dawn respectfully correct a students' grammar by softly saying "pardon" in response to their "what?" shows that she holds their self-esteem in high regard while she is role-modeling manners (Observation D, 2).

#### *The Development of Teachers' Beliefs about Classroom Management*

The literature on learning to teach outlines three categories of experience that have been described as influencing the development of beliefs and knowledge of teaching – personal experience, experience with schooling and instruction, and experience with formal knowledge (Richardson, 1996). Studies of the origins of teachers' beliefs indicate that many different life experiences will contribute to the formation of strong and enduring beliefs about teaching and learning. Research on pre-service teachers has shown that they arrive with beliefs that have been formed based on their experiences as students. When placed within the context of the classroom atmosphere, their established beliefs may make it difficult for them to have an impact (Richardson, 1996).

Statements made by participants confirmed the literature about experience being a major contributor to the development of classroom management beliefs. For example, Anne demonstrated personal and instruction experience when she talked about how her life experiences have influenced how she looks at and carries out classroom management. Living and teaching on three different continents has broadened her perspective; it has provided her with tools of understanding and tolerance that benefit teaching students in today's complex and colourful society.

Experience with formal knowledge is represented by understandings that have been agreed upon within a community of scholars as being worthwhile and valid (Richardson, 1996). Examples of formal knowledge that influence beliefs include the form and structure of subject matter in school subjects and pedagogical knowledge. Consistent with the literature, the participants mentioned several times that professional development and reading were actions they have taken to advance their knowledge in the classroom management area as well as influencing their belief systems. For example, Dawn first mentioned that she had participated in many workshops that the school board offered and positive classroom discipline meetings her Principal has provided for teachers in the school. Anne referred to professional development as an important part of developing belief systems with respect to being current with the various pedagogies and strategies surrounding classroom management. She suggested that there are teachers who have experience in terms of age and years, yet have done little to further their own education about classroom management issues, which can subsequently mean a lack of growth in the area.

Martin and Shoho (2000) found that teachers who are also parents might likely approach their classrooms differently from those who are not parents. The participants are parents of children ranging in age from youth to adult, and several state the significance of being a parent and teacher, thus reflecting the literature. For instance, Charles discussed how being a parent has affected the way he teaches and mentioned how his son recently graduated from the Faculty of Education. The at-home guidance kept him thinking about classroom management strategies. In terms of thinking differently, Anne spoke of how being a parent has made her put herself more “in the shoes” of her students; seeing classroom management issues from a different point of view has influenced her outlook on the issues that occur in the classroom.

Martin & Shoho (2000) found that practical classroom experiences make a difference in teachers’ perceptions and beliefs; the more richly developed training in the field, the better. Similarly, teaching experience with classroom management was an issue that featured prominently for several of the participants with respect to influencing their beliefs about classroom management. Beth stated it clearly when she said that one learns by doing; that seasoned teachers are typically better at managing their students because they have experienced more diverse situations. They have seen, heard, and discussed with colleagues ways to bring about solutions by using effective strategies and approaches to discipline. Beth believed that experience is the best teacher in terms of classroom management because it is an experiential process where teachers improve over time. She said that it is experience that makes teachers understand classroom management and allows them to move forward in learning from mistakes they make.

Regarding the amount of teaching experience, Martin and Baldwin (1993) stated that it seems years of experience may influence teachers' perceptions of classroom management style. This implies that experience may have a stronger basis for influencing classroom management style with respect to the learning and growth that emerge out of experiences because of practice. As for experience, novice teachers differ from, and are influenced by, those with more experience, regarding their attitudes concerning discipline. Beginning teachers were seen to be more patient and understanding while experienced teachers were more authoritarian (Martin & Baldwin, 1992). Martin and Shoho (2000) found that as teachers age, their beliefs and attitudes with respect to classroom management become more controlling.

In contrast to the literature, several participants described the opposite in terms of how they approached classroom management when they first began teaching. Both Beth and Anne described their classroom management styles as being stricter in their first years as teachers. It was evident through observations they are currently relaxed and patient with their students, a fact they attribute to experience and reflection. Their change from initially being strict to becoming relaxed over time contradicts the results mentioned above.

#### *How Teachers' Beliefs Affect Classroom Management Strategies*

*Modeling.* Beliefs have been described as being the best indicators of people's actions (Bandura, 1986). Also, beliefs strongly affect one's behaviour (Levin et al., 2005). For teachers, their beliefs ultimately affect both *what* they teach and *how* they teach in addition to passing them to their students. Therefore, it can be assumed that in

the area of classroom management, it is important for teachers to be aware of their beliefs, as they will model their beliefs through the strategies they choose to use.

Illustrating the impact of beliefs on behaviour, Beth mentioned several times in her interview that she uses herself as a role model for how she would like her students to behave. A part of this modeling is showing students how to resolve conflict and come to resolutions with each other to help build a positive group dynamic. She also discussed how her belief system is representative of how she presents herself, which she sees as being the biggest influence on students. She stated that students would remember most how their teachers treated them.

*Changes in Beliefs.* Richardson (1996) states that attitudes and beliefs are important concepts in understanding the thought processes and classroom practices of teachers. Being aware of what teachers believe in classroom management will help with understanding why they choose the strategies they use with their students. Levin et al. (2005) state that beliefs strongly affect one's behaviour; however, experiences and reflection upon action may lead to changes or amendments to beliefs. Changes in beliefs are beneficial, given that having a strong and positive belief system will benefit both the teacher and his or her students. Being aware of the types of beliefs that are positive as opposed to those that need work will help teachers become educators that are more effective. Researchers state that significant change in teachers can only occur if they are engaged in personal exploration, experimentation, and reflection upon their thoughts and actions (Richardson, 1996).

The issue of change is consistent with the literature surrounding the importance of changes in beliefs. Change was a theme that surfaced often throughout the interviews.



The participants described change as an extension of learning how to be an effective classroom manager. They reflected on the classroom management styles they had when they first began teaching; several of them stated that they were much different from the current approaches they use. For example, Charles stated that his beliefs have changed in terms of the expectations he has for his students; he implied that, as a new teacher, he expected his students to understand long division right away. After conversing with his Principal then, Charles came to appreciate that students will learn when they are ready; every student is different in terms of their learning style.

Anne stated that her beliefs meant that she is flexible and open, which is different from the authoritative style that she had when she started teaching. Beth noted that she initially needed to control everything and subsequently was not customary with who she was. Upon reflection, she likes herself more, now, as a classroom manager because of teaching experience and learning from her mistakes. She sees her belief system as static, with possibly the presentation of the belief system being dynamic. The issues she contends with, which change over time precipitate this.

*Willingness to Change.* Willingness to change in terms of classroom management outlooks and strategies was another belief that the participants discussed. It is important to be aware that classroom management styles are not the same as they were even a decade ago; they evolve to reflect the changes in society. Consequently, teachers need to be familiar with the different life situations and challenges that children face in today's society, as they may affect how students learn. These changes may reflect the higher occurrence of students with disabilities and special needs as well as cultural differences. For example, Dawn discussed how the belief systems students are exposed to at home

may be different from what she teaches in her classroom. She has to understand that they are coming from different backgrounds and structures. Dawn also mentioned how her classroom management style has changed with respect to making her lessons more exciting to compete with the increase of stimulation children seem to require, because of changes in the media and television.

Beth, Charles, and Anne discussed the impact on classroom management with having students with Oppositional-Defiance Disorder, Tourette's, and at-risk students with police records, respectively. They stated that experience and knowledge helped them develop their classroom management strategies with these issues. Beth also pointed out that a child may not have a typical "textbook case;" they may have more than one issue at hand. Experience has been the best teacher for her in that respect; she treats students with special needs slightly different depending on their circumstances.

#### *The Research Questions Revisited*

This chapter provided an overview of the answers to the research questions by comparing the findings to related literature outlined in the literature review. I developed these conclusions by the knowledge gained from the participants based on the interviews, observations, and field-notes. Specific answers to the research questions follow in summary form:

1. What are teachers' beliefs about classroom management? Teachers believe in mutual respect; respect *for* their students and respect *by* their students. They believe that students' needs must come first, and in being firm and fair with their students.

2. How did they develop their beliefs about classroom management? Teachers developed their beliefs through life experiences, such as experiencing different cultures and being parents. Professional reading and development from school board workshops keeps them aware of different pedagogies, theories and strategies of classroom management. They consider these to advance their knowledge and influence them to be better classroom managers. Above all, experience in teaching has shaped their beliefs and developed the strategies they currently use in the classroom. The process of classroom management is one that evolves over time in a school year and their teaching career.
3. How do their beliefs influence their choice of management strategies? Teachers' classroom management strategies are as varied as the situations require them to be. Experience presents a range of strategies they may choose because of learning from mistakes and from professional development. For some, the beliefs they hold influence the strategies they used about the learner and their outlook on learning. Their beliefs provide a foundation for their belief system's presentation to their students, more specifically by role modeling expectations.
4. How have beliefs changed since participants were pre-service teachers? Some of the participants have seen aspects of their beliefs and strategies about classroom management change more since they began teaching. They have described change as a necessary part of becoming an effective classroom manager, whether it comes from learning experience or gaining knowledge through professional development.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Conclusions and Implications

#### *Introduction*

This study offers a lens into teachers' beliefs regarding classroom management. In particular, research questions address how a group of teachers understand classroom management. Although previous researchers have examined beliefs regarding classroom management, more research is needed that explores the relationship between literature and management beliefs. My study has contributed to existing knowledge in studies of teachers' beliefs regarding classroom management; specifically, I have provided definitions, identified essential beliefs and strategies and described the development of these beliefs. In this final chapter, I will discuss personal reflections regarding the research in addition to outlining significant conclusions. Following, I will consider implications for theory, practice, and research.

#### *Personal Reflections*

I have learned a great deal both personally and professionally from my experiences with the research. I have had the opportunity to be involved in a research process on a deeper level by conducting face-to-face interviews with participants and by observing in their classrooms. As a result, I have gained a greater awareness of my own beliefs about classroom management and of teaching issues in general. Hearing the participants' personal reflections and being a part of their world of teaching, albeit a small portion, increased my interests in teachers' beliefs about classroom management. While reflecting on findings and research questions, I learned that I had more questions about selected issues.

My experiences with qualitative research methodology have taught me about empathy towards the beliefs and perceptions of other people. In addition, I have learned more about the interview process and how to be in the interviewer's position for the first time in a professional setting. My first experience with conducting a semi-structured interview was more relaxed than I anticipated. I interviewed three teachers on the same day, the second immediately after the first, and the third an hour after the second. Scheduling the interviews in this manner was a result of convenience for the participants' teaching schedules. I found that I was grateful for my advisor's advice that I do my preparation early the day before the interviews and take the evening off to relax and get a good night's sleep. Friendly and welcoming participants made it easier for me to feel relaxed in the interviewer role, and they appeared to be comfortable in my presence. As volunteers of this study, they chose to be involved. I feel that I received a great deal of information from these teachers who were eager to have their stories and views heard. It was an honour to be privy to their thoughts about classroom management beliefs and to observe them teach in the classroom.

### *Conclusions*

Several conclusions may be drawn from a consideration of the research process and the research questions of this study. Firstly, that classroom management is indeed a very important part of teaching and affects each of the participants both inside and outside of the classroom. The process of learning how to manage students in the classroom atmosphere is a process that develops over the course of the school year and involves the preparation and attention of the participants on many levels. This includes

bringing in past classroom experiences with various situations as well as knowledge gained from professional development workshops and reading related literature.

A second conclusion of this study concerns the participants' beliefs about classroom management. Beliefs include the idea that teachers need to teach respect to students and expect it from them. In addition, students' needs must come first and should be the focus of classroom management and at the heart of teaching. Beliefs about what strategies are essential for classroom management involve being firm and fair, prepared, flexible, and acknowledging the good that a student does – encouragement and recognition of positive behaviours rather than solely paying attention to negative conduct. Similarly, role modeling is an important aspect of managing several of the participants' classrooms; for instance, modeling the expectations for treating others with respect by explicitly showing respect for students. Essentially, this illustrates the importance of classroom management strategies being consistent with beliefs. Classroom management strategies may not be effective if they do not come from a belief system that supports them. The participants each demonstrated that their beliefs are consistent with the strategies they make use of and are representative of their disposition.

The third conclusion establishes that experience with classroom management is a fundamental part of learning how to manage classroom issues and in the development of classroom management beliefs. The participants described how their beliefs and/or strategies have evolved over the course of their teaching careers. They have been influenced by experience with a variety of classroom management situations and informed by professional development workshops and related literature. They have learned from other teachers and from their own experiences as students. Several of the

participants stressed how important is having teaching experience with classroom management in building skills and strategies for handling difficult and diverse situations.

A fourth conclusion directly relates to the third in terms of experience. The participants who mentioned change in terms of the development of their beliefs about classroom management also described the value in being willing to change over time. The participants implied that change has been a positive aspect in the development of their beliefs and strategies of classroom management. Looking at situations from a different point of view and learning from other teachers' strategies and approaches to managing a classroom is important to the learning process.

As for age and experience affecting discipline styles, research has shown that experienced teachers are more authoritative (Martin and Baldwin, 1992). In contrast, several participants described their classroom management styles as being stricter when they began teaching and stated that they are more relaxed now, which was evident through classroom observations. They attributed this change to experience and reflection.

I am able to generate these conclusions because of my approach to analyzing the data; for example, the use of ethnographic techniques and the constant comparative method. I have interpreted the data by exploring how the participants view their beliefs on classroom management; conclusions and implications are based on meaning and interpretation given to the data as well as comparisons made among the findings and related literature reviewed in Chapter Two.

## *Implications for Theory, Practice, and Further Research*

### *Implications for Theory*

The outcomes of this study support researchers' reports that classroom management is a significant concern for teachers (Levin, Nolan, Kerr, & Elliot, 2005). Each participant discussed how classroom management is an issue that they pay significant attention to while they are teaching. Teachers' beliefs are important to consider in understanding the classroom practices they use (Richardson, 1996). Adding to the literature and knowledge about classroom management will help teachers become more effective at handling the demanding and often challenging situations occurring more frequently in today's classrooms. My research indicates what teachers' beliefs about classroom management may be, and how they may affect the management strategies utilized in the classroom. Literature states that beliefs are reflected in actions (Levin et al., 2005); pre-service and practicing teachers may benefit by becoming aware of their own beliefs and considering the source of the strategies they choose to use in order to evaluate the effectiveness of their classroom management techniques. Beliefs and attitudes can affect how pre-service teachers learn (Richardson, 1996); in the area of classroom management, being aware of one's belief system in this regard may aid beginning teachers in understanding the theories of classroom management and the importance of using strategies that are consistent with the beliefs they possess.

### *Implications for Practice*

This study contributes to the existing knowledge in the field of education, specifically classroom management with a focus on teacher's beliefs. Following is a discussion of implications affecting educators.



Firstly, teachers need to be aware of the importance of personal and professional reflection concerning their beliefs about classroom management. Identifying how teachers view certain classroom management practices may help them realize why they choose certain strategies. Reviewing the decisions and consequences of their actions in the classroom may be useful in determining whether new approaches are necessary to effectively manage situations that arise. In addition, reading related literature may open teachers up to new management options and may help inform them of approaches that may work better for their teaching style.

Teachers also need to be informed about the impact their beliefs may have on the strategies they use in the classroom. Researchers have stated that part of being an effective classroom manager means using strategies that are consistent with ones' personal beliefs (Levin et al., 2005). Based on my research findings, which are consistent with the literature, I believe that teachers will be more successful with classroom management when they use methods that support their belief systems. For example, if teachers believe in the importance of respect in the classroom, they need to teach respect by providing examples for their students to follow and learn from.

Secondly, teacher education in classroom management courses should include a component on learning to identify beliefs and how they affect classroom practices. Beginning teachers may often be unaware of the impact their beliefs have on their behaviours in the classroom. Classroom management courses may incorporate this aspect to better prepare teachers. In addition, the idea that change is part of the development process in classroom management beliefs and strategies should be addressed. The willingness to change aspects of beliefs and strategies in order to be an

effective manager in a specific environment is important for teachers to be open to. Encouraging reflection and the openness to professional knowledge and advancement as well as current theories and research is an important consideration for becoming an effective classroom manager.

Thirdly, the participants discussed the significance of having experience in classroom management throughout this study. Teacher education programs may wish to provide the opportunity for beginning teachers to have a larger portion of training and field experience with managing classrooms. To further promote teacher support, mentors with strong backgrounds in classroom management knowledge may be helpful for beginning teachers to go to for advice and discussion. Classroom management is a major concern for teachers, and we can assume that it may be even more stressful for beginning teachers with little experience in the area. A need exists for a more specific focus on attention to teacher beliefs and classroom management skills during the practicum portion of the program, which may help pre-service teachers gain more knowledge about the issues. Most importantly, they would feel better prepared for managing classrooms on their own.

#### *Implications for Further Research*

Although this study is limited to the beliefs and perceptions of four teachers in one school board in Northwestern Ontario, it may have significance for other teachers in school boards across the province. Studies in this area may be conducted within and across school boards to increase understanding of diverse beliefs and practices. As mentioned previously, this study may be transferable where the issue is relevant and useful to other researchers.

The findings of this study raise the need for research into several areas. Further investigations are required regarding the types of training, support, and resources teachers have available to them about their beliefs about classroom management. Examining the support and resources available to beginning teachers in this area may also be necessary for making them more knowledgeable and feel more comfortable with classroom management. Investigations of this nature could provide a clearer understanding of how important it is to teach effective classroom management approaches. My research findings have influenced me to assume teaching experience and knowledge influence the development of beliefs, which in turn, may affect choices in classroom management strategies.

I recommend further investigations into ways in which teachers' beliefs correspond with classroom management strategies and in examining the effectiveness of particular beliefs and strategies. In this context, incorporating students' opinions and perceptions about the effectiveness of teachers' classroom management practices may expand this knowledge by offering a different, and important, point of view. Students' perspectives on the management strategies their teachers use may influence teachers to consider and possibly modify their approaches to classroom management with respect to their beliefs about classroom management.

#### *In Conclusion*

This study has provided a description and interpretation of participants' beliefs about classroom management. The findings suggest that beliefs about classroom management develop over time, influenced by teaching and life experience, and being current with related professional development.

Specifically, this study demonstrates that beliefs about classroom management include respect and having the needs of students come first. Strategies the participants believe in are being firm and fair, prepared, flexible, and acknowledging the good that students do. We discussed the importance of having first-hand classroom management experience and being open to change.

In closing, I wish to share the following statement made by one of the participants regarding the importance of being educated about classroom management:

You have to make the right choices when you're managing – you have to make the right choice about how you treat people; because, I'm the mother of two kids, both of them are in high school, and I listen to stories about how the way things are dealt with and it doesn't make me happy, but kids have to learn to deal with different personalities . . . . And [teachers] are so stressed about getting the curriculum across that they don't know how to manage, to get the curriculum across. And [the students] are not being managed and they're not getting curriculum either. So, who's winning? I mean, who's winning here? I firmly believe, student teachers, I tell them, 'You know, you've got to learn how to manage first, then you teach the curriculum second. That's the second thing on your plate.' It's a process, and it's a very learned one; experience is the best teacher with respect to classroom management (Interview B, 15).

I found this statement to be particularly poignant because the participant's belief in the significance of becoming an effective classroom manager in order to establish a successful classroom environment is important to consider. This study

has shown that teachers' beliefs about classroom management are important to be aware of, reflected upon, and practiced, as they influence management strategies and may affect how students learn as a result. Both students and teachers will ultimately benefit from teachers who put forth effort into educating themselves concerning their beliefs about classroom management.

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## APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Cover Letter to School Board

APPENDIX B: Cover Letter to Teachers

APPENDIX C: Consent Form for Participation

APPENDIX D: General Interview Guideline

APPENDIX A

Cover Letter to School Board

April, 2005

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Jennifer Foxworthy and I am a graduate student in the Master of Education program at the Faculty of Education at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay. As part of the requirements of the program, I am planning to conduct a study investigating teachers' beliefs about classroom management. I would like to ask your Board's permission to allow me to collect my data at one or several of your elementary schools.

As part of my study I will be inviting four teachers to participate in two semi-structured and taped interviews about their beliefs about classroom management, taking approximately one hour each. In addition, I am requesting permission to observe the teachers in their classroom setting for one-half of a teaching day or less to analyze the information gathered during the interviews. In total the data collection should take approximately two weeks to collect.

To ensure confidentiality, the school board, school and participants' names will not be identified and pseudonyms will be assigned. There are no physical, psychological or social risks involved with the study and participants may benefit from the opportunity to reflect on their beliefs about classroom management. Participation is strictly voluntary and participants reserve the right to withdraw from the project at any time.

All of the data will remain confidential. The findings from this study shall be summarized and submitted to my supervisor at the Faculty of Education at Lakehead University as my completed thesis. The data will be stored in a secure location at the university for seven years at which time it will be destroyed.

If you have any questions concerning this study, please contact me in Thunder Bay at (807) 767-8132, or in London at (519) 645-1444. The supervisor of this research is Dr. Karen Reynolds. Her office number at Lakehead University is (807) 766-7197, and her home phone number is (807) 344-6369. Thank you very much for your consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Elizabeth Foxworthy



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APPENDIX B

Cover Letter to Teachers

April, 2005

Dear Teacher,

My name is Jennifer Foxworthy and I am a graduate student in the Master of Education program at Lakehead University. For my thesis I am examining teachers' beliefs about classroom management. I hope to discover what these beliefs are and how their classroom management strategies are affected by them. Studies have shown that people's beliefs affect their actions, and the information gathered from my study will add to existing research on teachers' beliefs. My study may provide information for pre-service courses at faculties of education to better prepare teachers with learning classroom management strategies.

I am inviting you to participate in two semi-structured and taped interviews about your beliefs about classroom management, taking approximately one hour each. In the event that you and I decide that a second interview is not necessary there will only be one interview. In addition, I am requesting permission to observe you in your classroom setting for one-half of a teaching day or less to analyze the information gathered during the interviews.

To ensure confidentiality, your name will not be identified and you will be assigned a pseudonym. There are no physical, psychological or social risks involved with my study and you may benefit from the opportunity to reflect on your beliefs about classroom management. Participation is strictly voluntary and you reserve the right to withdraw from the project at any time.

All of the data will remain confidential. The findings from this study shall be summarized and submitted to my supervisor at the Faculty of Education at Lakehead University as my completed thesis. The data will be stored in a secure location at the university for seven years at which time it will be destroyed.

If you have any questions concerning this study, please contact me in Thunder Bay at (807) 767-8132, or in London at (519) 645-1444. The supervisor of this research is Dr. Karen Reynolds. Her office number at Lakehead University is (807) 766-7197, and her home phone number is (807) 344-6369. Thank you so much for your time and consideration. Your efforts are greatly appreciated!

Sincerely,

Jennifer Elizabeth Foxworthy



## APPENDIX C

## Consent Form for Participation

April, 2005

My signature on this form indicates that I agree to participate in a study by Miss Jennifer E. Foxworthy on TEACHERS' BELIEFS ABOUT CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT. This will include two interviews and one classroom observation. In the event that I and the researcher decide that a second interview is not necessary there will only be one interview. It also shows that I understand the following:

- I am a volunteer and can withdraw at any time from the study.
- There is no risk of physical or psychological harm.
- The information I give will be strictly confidential and all data will be collected and analyzed by the researcher and will be securely stored at Lakehead University for seven years at which time it will be destroyed.
- I will receive a summary of the study, upon request.

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I, \_\_\_\_\_ agree to participate in the interviews and observation.  
(Please print name)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX D

## General Interview Guideline for Teachers' Beliefs about Classroom Management

1. What does classroom management mean to you? How do you define it? Why?
2. What are your beliefs about classroom management?
  - a. How do they affect your classroom method strategies and why?
  - b. How do they affect your students?
3. How would you describe your classroom management style? Why? How would an observer describe your classroom management style? Why?
4. Explain how you developed your belief system about classroom management.

Have your beliefs about classroom management changed since you were a beginning teacher? If so, what has affected or influenced your beliefs? Do you think they will continue to change the more you teach? Why or why not?